



TITANIA'S



YVETTE IN
ITALY

PALACE



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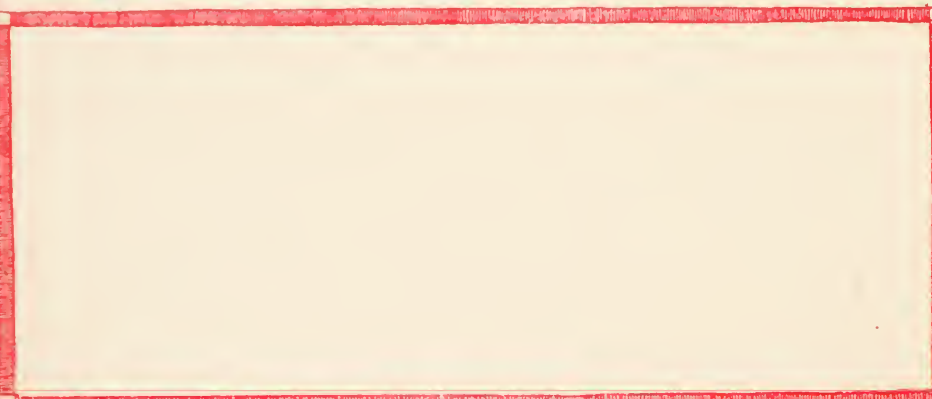


THE HOPE OF
ALL WHO
SUFFER

THE DREAD OF
ALL WHO
WRONG



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YVETTE IN ITALY



I KNOW not if this tale be true,
But thus the simple facts are stated;
And I refer their truth to you,
Since Love and you are near related.

THOMAS MOORE.



YVETTE

YVETTE IN ITALY
AND
TITANIA'S PALACE

BY
NEVILE WILKINSON

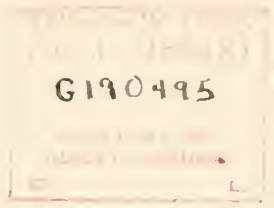
WITH TWENTY-FOUR ILLUSTRATIONS

Read on: if you knew it,
You have cause to boast:
You are much the wiser
Though I know the most.
CHRISTINA ROSSETTI.

HODDER AND STOUGHTON
LIMITED LONDON

1922

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W

TO
GUENDOLEN
AND
PHYLLIS

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OPINIONS OF THE FAIRYLAND PRESS

“ This pleasant and really instructive little book ”—*Fairy Whisper*.

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“ Deserves a chorus of approval.”—*Croakers' Chronicle*.

“ We wriggled as we read it.”—*The Tadpole*.

OYEZ OYEZ OYEZ

Titania Q.

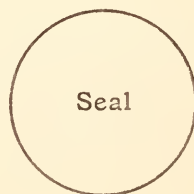
THE MOST INDUSTRIOUS ORDER OF
THE FAIRY KISS

To All and Singular as well Humans as Fairies Gnomes Sprites and Elves of Good Intent I TITANIA Queen of All the Fairies send due Salutation and Greeting

Whereas it hath been ordained by the Statutes of Our Most Industrious ORDER OF THE FAIRY KISS that certain Qualified and Approved Humans may be admitted into the aforesaid Most Industrious Order and further that such Qualification and Approbation shall be obtained only by those who have rendered signal service to the NEGLECTED, UNHAPPY or CRIPPLED CHILDREN of their race

Know Ye therefore that I the said TITANIA Queen of the Fairies Sovereign of The aforesaid Most Industrious Order do by These Presents Declare and Ordain that every Human who shall duly complete and forward the FORM which in accordance with Our Command has been placed at the End of the Volume entitled YVETTE IN ITALY AND TITANIA'S PALACE shall thereby become Eligible for Admission into Our aforesaid Most Industrious Order.

Given under Our Hand and Seal at Our Hall of the Fairy Kiss in Our Palace.



CHARACTERS IN THE STORY

YVETTE, the Heroine, aged 12. } Guests.
MARIETTA, her Friend, aged 11. }
THE PAINTER, also called MAESTRO, the Host.
MARIA, aged 7. } Italian Models.
BEPPINO or BEPPINO, aged 4. }
LEONIDAS K. HOFFMANN, a rich American.
INEZ, his daughter, aged 13.
MARGHERITA FARALDO, the Cook.
ISABELLA D'ESTE, also called BELLA, the Maid.
CARLO, the Old Gardener.
CARLOTTA, his invalid Daughter.
NANNY, a Nurse.
And other people, but they are not so important.

The Scene is laid principally near Florence.

CHAPTER I

THE JOURNEY BEGINS

The myrtle and the rose, the rose,
The sunshine and the swallow,
The dream that comes, the wish that goes,
The memories that follow!

W. E. HENLEY.

YVETTE was sitting for her portrait.

The picture was getting on well enough, but on this particular morning the light was bad and the studio was cold.

So when big clouds drifted up and obscured the light altogether, and the rain began, the Painter shut up his paint-box with a snap, and said:

“It’s no go, Yvette, you can jump down!”

So Yvette, who had been sitting on an old oak chest, with her arm on a big majolica jar, just as you see her in the Frontispiece, got down and ran behind his chair to look at the picture.

“What a shame!” she said, for she was very sympathetic; “just as it was getting on so nicely! Never mind, it will be sunny again to-morrow.” And she put her arm round his neck to comfort him, for she and the Painter were very old friends.

“There won’t be much sun in Ireland after September,” he grumbled; “and it’ll get cold and damp, and I know I’ll get rheumatics.”

And he looked so gloomy that Yvette felt she must change the subject.

"Why," she exclaimed, "you haven't even opened your letters. You are funny; fancy leaving them on the table like that!"

"Oh, they're sure to be bills or Income Tax forms, they always are nowadays," he said, growing more and more depressed.

"This one has a funny stamp," said Yvette; she took it up, and tried to make out the inscription. "Vit-tor-io Emm. . . . something."

"Sounds like an Italian one," said the Painter, his interest aroused; "only think, Yvette, a day or two ago it was in the land of roses and sunshine; then an unkind fate stuck it on a letter and into a musty old bag, and now, poor thing, it finds itself hundreds of miles from its home, in a nasty damp climate!"

"Well, anyhow, you may as well open it and see who it's from," said Yvette impatiently: she couldn't understand how anybody could help opening a letter the moment it arrived.

The Painter put on his spectacles and looked at the postmark.

"By Jove," he exclaimed, "it looks like Firenze. That's the Italian for Florence. This is getting interesting. Only think, my dear, the City of Flowers! Oh, if I could only take you there!"

And he tore open the envelope.

"What's this! Torre della Pace. . . .

'I am obliged to leave Italy for a year, and the Torre will be empty unless I find someone to go there who loves it as much as I do: I wouldn't leave it in the hands of strangers for anything.

Come and occupy it for me, there's a good chap: I know it will be safe in your hands!'

Yvette, I'm offered the Torre della Pace for twelve months! Am I dreaming? Read it to me! Is that really what he says?" and he threw the letter across to her.

Yvette took it up and read it over solemnly.

"You're quite sure it's actually there?" he asked anxiously.

"That's exactly what it says," said Yvette confidently; "but it doesn't begin quite like you said: it is Tor della Pace, not Torrey della Parchay as you call it."

“ Oh, that's all right, it's pronounced like that in Italian, and it means Tower of Peace. Where's a telegraph form? I mustn't lose a moment! You'll come with me, won't you, Yvette?

We'll paint a splendid big picture out there, all marble and flowers and sunshine. I know a glorious place for it in the Fountain Court. And we'll see dear old Margherita the cook, and Carlo the gardener; they must be still there, the place wouldn't be the same without them.”

Yvette thought the Painter was only joking, but she pretended to think he was serious, and said gravely: “ Of course I'll come; when are you going to start?”

“ As soon as I possibly can,” he replied; “ before the Autumn is over. Think of the roses, Yvette, hedges of them! The Torre is just on the hill above Florence, with such a lovely garden. But I'm afraid,” he went on thoughtfully, “ that you'll be lonely with only an old Painter to talk to.”

“ I shouldn't mind a bit,” she said bravely; “ besides, you're not old really.”

“ All the same, it would be nicer for you to have a companion to play with; I wonder if Marietta would come too.”

“ Who is Marietta?” asked Yvette.

“ She is the child I told you about, who used to sit for me when I was painting pictures in London: wait a minute, I believe I have a picture of her somewhere. Yes, here she is, lying on a rug and turning over the pages of one of my old books. Poor little woman, she could only look at the pictures, because of her eyes; they are so weak that the doctor wouldn't let her read; so she had to leave school.”

“ Oh, I am sorry for her! perhaps it would do her eyes good to come with us; she needn't use them at all: we could just tell each other stories. She looks awfully nice, and what soft hair she's got.”

“ She's a dear little girl, and would be a splendid companion for you. Only fancy, her mother is French, and her father, who died when she was quite a baby, was Italian: but she's very proud of

being born in England, and hates being called a foreigner. Marietta is an excellent model, as we painters call the people who sit for us.

I feel sure I could paint a fine picture with you two in it, and we might find some pretty Italian children to put in as well."

"Do write to her mother at once!" cried Yvette, who was entering into the spirit of the adventure.

* * * * *

But she couldn't believe she was really going to Italy, until she said "good-bye" to her mother and father, and settled down between Nanny and a little girl she hadn't seen before, in a comfortable railway carriage.

The whistle sounded and they were off.

Nanny was coming to take care of the two children while they were in Florence. You may be sure she was a nice, kind Nurse, or we shouldn't have let her into the story.

Yvette and Marietta looked shyly at each other, and the Painter, who was busy counting the packages over their heads, suddenly remembered they hadn't met before.

"Why bless me, where are my wits!" he said, "Yvette, this is Marietta; and these are your two new charges, Nanny."

So the children were introduced. "Why! you're a Girl Guide too," said Marietta, catching sight of the familiar brass trefoil with its magic letters G.G. "I've got mine on under my coat," she explained.

Then the ice was broken, and the new friends chattered away about Badges and Camps and Brownies and All-round Cords, until the Painter felt satisfied that the two would be quite happy together.

Now and again they looked out at the country as it slipped by. The leaves were turning a golden brown, and the Kentish woods looked their best in the Autumn sunshine.

Here and there a gorgeous cock pheasant stood proudly at the edge of a wood.

"There goes a bunny!" they cried, as they caught sight of a

rabbit bobbing up the bank, and disappearing into his burrow, with a frisk of a little white tuft of a tail.

Marietta had often stayed with an aunt in Kent, and she told Yvette about the hop-pickers, who came in crowds from the East End of London, bringing funny little babies, who lay in cradles made of sacks, while their mothers and sisters and brothers stripped the hop-vines.

So the journey passed; and when the scrunching of the brakes announced their arrival at Folkestone, the two children felt they had known each other for years.

The Painter had composed a beautiful account of the crossing from Folkestone to Boulogne.

He considered it a fine piece of writing: all about heaving waves streaked with foam; wind humming fiercely through the rigging; the thump and hiss of spray splashing on wet decks, and things like that.

He read it proudly to Yvette, and awaited her approval.

But she looked anything but happy!

“While you were reading about how the sea kept surging up over the side of the ship I felt quite . . . you know,” she said, “and I’m afraid that other little girls who are seasick when it’s rough will feel like that when they read it!”

The Painter’s memory brought back a vision of two woe-begone figures, tucked up, side by side, on a wet seat, clasping a . . . and then the recollection of the look of misery on each little face stopped him from carrying the scene any farther.

With a sigh he tore the pages he had written into little pieces. And so, dear readers, you must be content to know that our two heroines had a rough crossing, and didn’t enjoy it.

(“I call it mean of you to put that in the story,” says a voice at my elbow.)

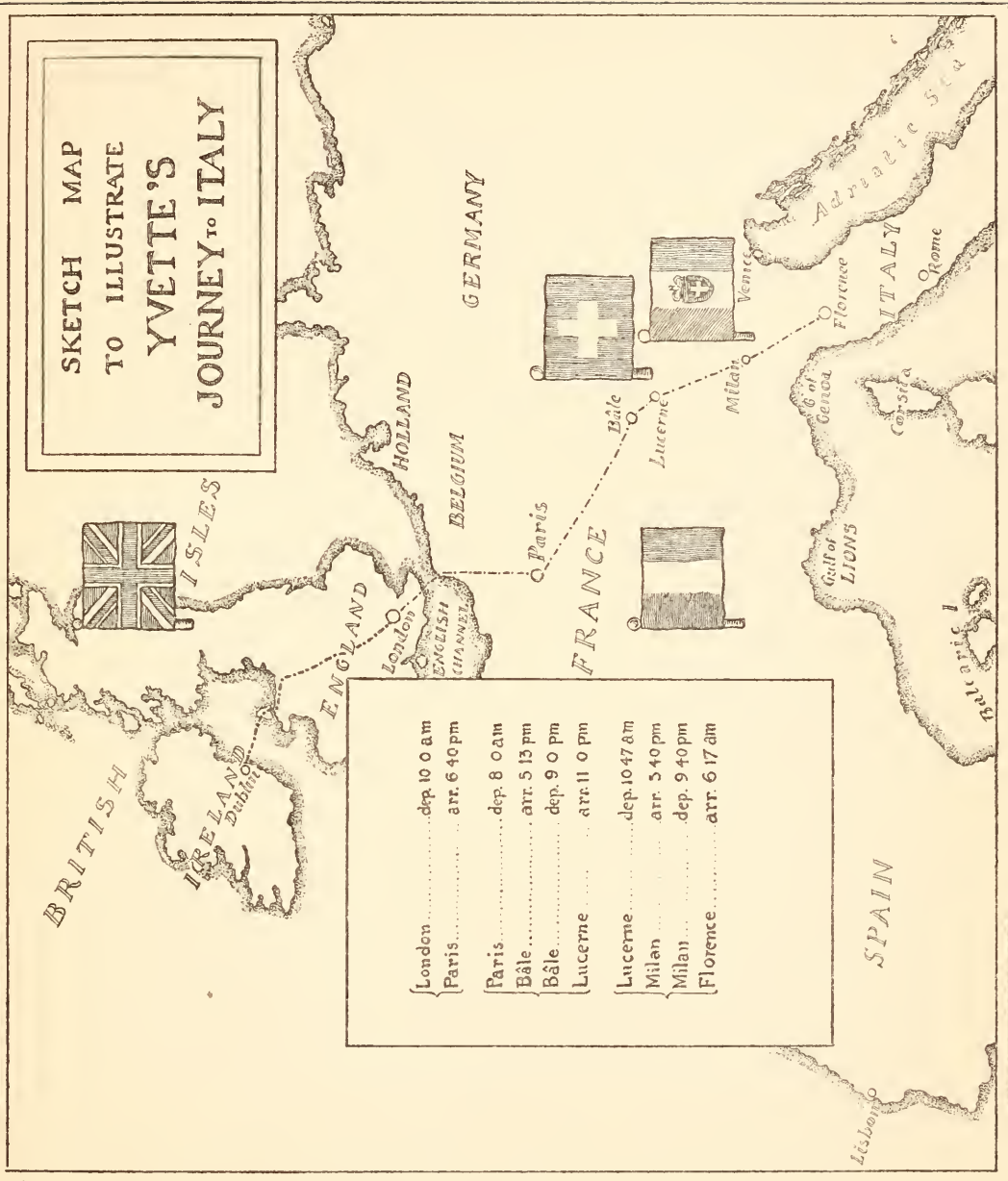
That’s the reason I can’t describe the country they passed through between Boulogne and Amiens. Nanny wisely insisted on the children lying down; so they naturally couldn’t look out of the window.

After Amiens the pale cheeks had grown rosy again, and the Painter pointed out great holes torn in the ground by German shells: ruined cottages, and trenches where brave men had fought and died to save France.

A very drowsy couple looked out of the station omnibus, when, with a clatter of horseshoes on asphalt, it turned into the courtyard of a Paris hotel.

Nanny brought them each a cup of hot milk, but they were so sleepy that she could scarcely persuade the little flushed faces to raise themselves off their pillows to drink it. And they slept dreamlessly into the next chapter.

SKETCH MAP
TO ILLUSTRATE
YVETTE'S
JOURNEY TO ITALY



{ London	.....dep. 10 0 am
{ Paris	.....arr. 6 40 pm
{ Paris	.....dep. 8 0 am
{ Bâle	.....arr. 5 13 pm
{ Bâle	.....dep. 9 0 pm
{ Lucerne	.....arr. 11 0 pm
{ Lucerne	.....dep. 10 47 am
{ Milan	.....arr. 5 40 pm
{ Milan	.....dep. 9 40 pm
{ Florence	.....arr. 6 17 am

CHAPTER II

PARIS

The World is so full of a number of things
I'm sure we should all be as happy as kings.

R. L. STEVENSON.

NEXT morning, bright and early, two little figures in white jumped out of bed, ran to the long French window, and peeped through the lace curtains.

Outside, in the courtyard below, the wet pavement reflected a jolly looking porter, wearing a blue apron, who was washing down the asphalt with a hose. Now and then he stopped to speak to a maid who leant out of one of the upper windows beating a rug with a funny instrument made of cane twisted into the shape of a fan.

Marietta and Yvette could not understand what he said, but the maid tossed her head and shut the window, so they decided that it must have been something cheeky.

Next, a postman came in under the archway through which they had been driven the night before. He carried a black case, overflowing with letters and newspapers, slung before him on a broad leather strap, and held another huge bundle of them in his hand. The porter pointed the nozzle of his hose towards the ground so that the postman could pass without being splashed, and they bid each other a cheery good morning. The maid's head popped out again up above and she called to the postman, but he only shrugged his shoulders and bustled on out of sight below them.

"Come back to bed at once," cried Nanny, peeping in from the next room: "you'll catch your deaths of cold: it's not seven o'clock."

But she couldn't persuade the little pair to go to sleep again, though they obediently popped under the blankets. For they were much too excited at the thought that they were in Paris, and well on their way to Italy.

They enjoyed the "petit déjeuner" of crisp rolls and delicious Brittany butter, which, with steaming cups of chocolate, was brought up to their bedroom.

Then, with faces as bright as the ribbons round their hair, they ran downstairs and found the Painter comfortably reading a French newspaper.

"Good morning," he said, looking up with a smile; "shall we start with a couple of hours arithmetic? You didn't do any lessons at all yesterday."

"Please don't tease us," pleaded Yvette; "Do! Do!! Do!!! take us out to see Paris." And they each caught hold of an arm and pulled him up out of his chair.

"I must go and see if the tickets are all right for to-morrow. Perhaps after that we can have a walk together before luncheon. But you had better get your hats on," he added.

They were off in a flash, and before he had time to pick up his paper, two pairs of legs were twinkling up the broad staircase. Yes, twinkling is the only word that describes it!

"Now my dears, we'll go first to Cook's, then to the Tuileries Gardens, and perhaps a little way up to Champs Elysées, to get an appetite," he said, when they came back. "In the afternoon I will take you to the Louvre to do some lessons."

The children's faces fell: they didn't know what the Louvre was, but they felt sure it must be some kind of school.

"Never mind," whispered Marietta to her companion: "We'll have a good look at Paris this morning."

So they trotted off together down the Rue Saint Honoré, where the shops were just beginning to wake.

Some were having their eyelids pushed up for them; others

having their faces washed with brooms and cloths, and little round tables with marble tops were being set out in front of the Cafés.

The children insisted on stopping in front of a shop where they sell everything to make a little dog comfortable.

Basket kennels, brushes and combs, jackets with pockets out of which peeped the corners of folded handkerchiefs. The spoilt pets' names were embroidered on the jackets and handkerchiefs: names like our Jill, or Tiny, or Gyp, but, of course, in French.

There were even little slippers with fur inside them to keep their feet warm!

The Painter didn't approve of dogs being pampered in this way, when so many poor children hadn't a decent frock to wear: but his companions made up their minds that they must some day have a wee dog fully equipped with all the luxuries displayed in the window.

"What's that huge column?" asked Yvette, as they turned into a square surrounded by tall houses.

"That's called the Colonne Vendôme," said the Painter, "it was put up to celebrate the victories of the great Napoleon. It's made of the cannons he took in his wars.

You wouldn't think when you see it now," he continued, "that not so very long ago it lay on the ground, just where we're walking, broken in pieces: for it was pulled down by people called Communists, who wanted to burn and destroy everything."

"Whatever did they want to do that for?" asked Yvette.

"It's much too difficult a question for me to answer all at once," said the Painter, smiling, "you'll find, when you grow up, that there are always foolish people who think they can only do their country good by noise and numbers."

"That sounds rather silly, doesn't it?" said Marietta.

"I think quiet people are much the nicest," Yvette agreed.

"Come! Come! my dears," he said, when they were in the street on the other side of the great Place Vendôme: "if you want



THE COLONNE VENDÔME

to look at all the jewellery in the Rue de la Paix, I'd better send a telegram to say we shan't reach Florence until next Autumn!"

Business at Cook's didn't take long, for it was early, and the usual bustling crowd of tourists hadn't arrived. Soon they passed the column again and entered the Gardens of the Tuileries.

Crossing a terrace, they walked down some broad stone steps, between bronze groups of fierce wild animals fighting.

On one side a rhinoceros was trampling on a tiger, on the other a wild boar, lion, and a lioness were engaged in deadly combat. Below them was an open space planted with rows and rows of trees in regular lines. In between these were stone and marble statues, and here and there beds bright with autumn flowers.

Then Marietta gave a cry of joy. "Look! Look! Yvette! there are the horses Nanny told us about!"

And there, sure enough, was the famous Merry-go-round, with its prancing steeds, black, white, chestnut, and bay; and here and there a painted carriage for the little ones.

But the French children were all busy elsewhere, so the mettlesome steeds hung motionless.

"Never mind, you shall have a ride this afternoon," said the Painter; "now we'll go to the right, past the round pond, across the Place de la Concorde into the Avenue des Champs Elysées."

"Oo! those are dreadfully long names," said Yvette, "we'll never remember them."

They passed through the gates of the Gardens, and the Painter made the children take his hand.

"Paris is a dangerous city for people who want to cross the road," he explained, "there are so many reckless drivers; and this is one of the worst places, for the traffic comes dashing across it from all directions."

They were so busy looking out for taxis and motors, that they only just glanced at the big Egyptian Obelisk, like Cleopatra's Needle, and the fountains which adorned the Place.

Once safely across they found more avenues of trees on each side of a broad road.

Here they saw many babies, some carried, others wheeled in perambulators by stately nurses, who wore flat bows of ribbon on their heads, from which hung broad streamers, reaching almost to the ground.

There were very few older children to be seen; perhaps, as Marietta sagely remarked, they were at school or doing lessons at home.

“As you two ought to be, by rights,” added the Painter.

“I don’t know how you feel,” he said, presently, “but I’m hungry: so I vote we trot back and have our luncheon. Let’s just come to the edge of the road and have a look at the great Arc de Triomphe away up there against the sky; built to celebrate Napoleon’s victories.

But what’s the use of giving all this information to two little addlepates, you’ll have forgotten it all long before you get home!”

“That stone lady with the flags round her, sitting at the corner of the Place de la Concorde,” he told them, as they were on their way back, “represents the town of Strasburg.

When I first came to Paris, she was covered with wreaths, called immortelles, just as if someone lay buried below. Now,” he added, smiling, “can either of you tell me why that was?”

Yvette looked at Marietta, for she knew she had been to school, and must have learnt history there; and Marietta looked at Yvette, who had often talked about her governesses and the long lessons she learnt at home. Then they both laughed.

“I thought as much,” said the Painter, “well, it was because the Germans took Strasburg and kept it after the Franco-Prussian war. So the French nation mourned for their lost town as you mourn for a dear relation. Now they have won it back again, so it’s joyfully decked out with flags!”

“Doesn’t it strike you as being comic,” he remarked, as they walked on, “that here I am between a little girl called Yvette, and a

little girl called Marietta, and yet Yvette doesn't know a word of French, and Marietta doesn't know a word of Italian; while I, with an honest English name, know a good deal of both languages? What your Godfathers and Godmothers did for you I don't know, but they certainly gave you funny names. You ought to have been called Jane and Polly!"

"Well, anyhow, we weren't asked," said Yvette, with a little toss of her head; "besides, they always called me Bill."

"You're right, Yvette, and I withdraw my remark," said the Painter, "after all I might have been called David and I don't speak a word of Welsh."

That big building on our left with the pillars is the French Admiralty, the Ministère de la Marine. Charles Méryon, the great French etcher, made a delightful little picture of it. I don't quite know why we call him a Frenchman, for his father was an English doctor."

"I don't see what difference that makes," said Marietta, indignantly, "my father was Italian, but I'm English!" And Yvette and the Painter couldn't help smiling.

They reached their Hotel through the wonderful colonnade of the Rue de Rivoli, which extends as far as the title of the next chapter.

CHAPTER III

THE LOUVRE

The singers have sung and the builders have builded,
The painters have fashioned their tales of delight.

WILLIAM MORRIS.

NANNY wisely insisted on the children having a rest after luncheon, and then they set off again.

This time they found the enclosure of the Merry-go-round crowded with children of all ages and sizes, waiting their turn.

“ I shall ride a white horse,” said Marietta, “ I like them best.”

“ You had better get on the first you can,” advised the painter. “ Here’s a franc ; the rides are fifteen centimes each, how many rides can you have ? ”

Marietta and Yvette both looked puzzled ; then a bright idea struck the latter.

“ Perhaps it would help if you told us first how many centimes there are in a franc,” she said.

The Painter explained that there were one hundred ; but seeing the little faces still puzzled, told them that there were ten centimes in a penny, and five in a halfpenny, and that ten pence went to a franc.

Yvette, who was really a quick child at figures, cried triumphantly, “ We’ll have three apiece, and there will be a penny over, come on Marietta ! ” and they ran off to take their places.

The Painter watched the merry crowd whirling round, and each time his little friends passed they waved their hands to each other.

After the third turn they came back with such radiant faces, that the Painter dived into his pocket and produced a half franc piece.

"I've a penny left," cried Yvette, "let's see, there are five in half a franc; come along! that's two more each!"

"And now it's lesson time," said the Painter as the pair rejoined him, "it will never do to keep old Mrs. Louvre waiting!"

They walked on through the trees, past a pond with a shoal of goldfish swimming lazily round it, who seemed quite undisturbed by the fleet of tiny yachts which sailed over them.

Then on through gardens bright with flowers and crowded with statues, until they came to an archway with pink pillars, standing at the entrance of a big square.

Round three sides of the square were buildings, decorated all over with pillars, carved figures, wreaths of stone flowers, and every kind of ornament you can imagine.

"Before we go any farther I want you to promise me something, my dears," said the Painter. "Whenever I begin to talk about things you don't understand, just look up and say 'aeroplanes.' Then I shall know I am getting too far up into the clouds for you to follow."

"That's a splendid idea," said Yvette approvingly, "it *is* a little hard to understand all you say. But this big place isn't all a school, is it?"

"Well, perhaps it is better described as a place where we gain knowledge," said the Painter.

"We were learning to ride just now," remarked Marietta.

"You lazy little thing! You seem to think life is to be one long happy holiday, all games and sunshine," said the Painter, smiling.

And then they passed through a big leather door at the top of a flight of steps.

The two children stood bewildered. To right and left of them ran galleries ending in wide marble staircases in the far distance; so far away that the people on them looked no bigger than black dots.

"It's wonderful," said Marietta in an awestruck voice.

“Come along, my dears,” said the Painter, “we haven’t time to look at the statues here. Before we go upstairs I’m going to take you down these steps to the left, to see the most famous statue in the world.”

“But where are the class rooms where they do lessons?” asked Yvette, “all the people I’ve seen seem simply loitering about and looking at things; and there are very few children. But,” she added brightly, “they may be hard at work in the rooms upstairs.”

“I believe he was teasing us,” said Marietta, “perhaps the lessons he means are just learning about the things we see. It looks to me like a museum, like the one behind the big railings in London.”

They were walking through a series of rooms filled with marble and stone statues, and the Painter was saved from saying anything in his defence; for Yvette caught sight of a white figure, standing grand and lonely at the end of the corridor, against a background of deep red curtains.

“Look!” she said, in an awestruck voice, “isn’t she proud and quiet, and so white! She seems to be looking at something far away we can’t see!”

“But what *has* become of her arms, have they gone to be mended?” asked Marietta, for her practical little mind carried her back to the time when a favourite doll had suffered in the same way.

“They weren’t found when the statue was dug up: for it lay buried in the soil of a Greek island for more than two thousand years: The island of Melos, now called Milo. That’s why it’s called the Venus of Milo,” explained the Painter.

“I’ve brought you here to show you the Beauty of Repose; when that has sunk into your minds, I’ll take you to see the Beauty of Action. And I want you also to see that a woman can look beautiful without high-heeled boots, or a pinched-in waist.

I don’t mean that your mammas, or grown-up relations, should wear quite as little as Venus,” he added hastily, fearing that matter-of-fact Marietta might take him too literally. “I want you to remem-



THE VENUS OF MILO



THE WINGED VICTORY

ber when you grow up and choose your own dresses, that nature gave your bodies grand and simple lines. And then you won't be so ready to turn them into something like an hour-glass, as fashionable ladies did when I was your age."

By this time they had come to the feet of the great figure, and they walked slowly round it without speaking: for there is something so solemn about the majestic goddess, that you can't help feeling as if you are in church, and mustn't talk.

The Painter, who had seen the statue many times before, felt sad to think that the pure stream of Art has wandered into marshy land, where it is broken up into muddy streamlets, each babbling noisily in its own obscure little channel.

But he didn't say this out loud, for fear both the children might say " aeroplanes."

Then they came back to the marble staircase and saw above them a great winged figure.

" This is called the Winged Victory of Samothrace," said the Painter, " because it was found on an island of that name.

It's supposed to be Victory alighting on the prow of a Greek ship of war. Look at it carefully, because it tells you of the Beauty of Action."

" But this one hasn't a head," said Yvette.

" Well, anyhow, she couldn't be sick if it was rough!" chimed in Marietta.

" Come along, my dears," said the Painter hastily: " I was going to point out some of the beauties of poor Niké, as the Greeks called her (pronounced Nykee, or Neekay), but I think I'll wait until you are a little older!

I want you two to learn that there can be great beauty, both in a figure in repose and in a figure in action: later on I will show you a figure representing the two combined, which we'll call—action in repose."

" I wonder if it'll have any legs," said Marietta.

“Doesn't her dress look as if the wind was blowing? and what wonderful wings! She looks as if she can really fly.” And Yvette turned regretfully away, for she had caught something of the glory of the majestic masterpiece which dominates the Louvre.

Now they came into a long room, lighted down one side and at the end by tall windows, every inch of it covered with gilded decorations, ceiling and walls alike.

A row of glass cases stood in the centre, and there were others under the windows and against the walls, filled with treasures which it would take many volumes to describe.

The Painter was too wise to overwhelm his little pupils with this endless array of masterpieces. He wished them to see and remember three things only. Two they had seen, and the third, the Mirror of Marie de Medici, lay in a case under one of the windows.

“It's no use trying to describe it in a book,” said Yvette, “for every bit of it would want a book to describe it in!”

“What a lucky lady she was to be able to look at herself in it whenever she liked,” sighed Marietta.

“I want you to remember the mirror, because it shows you that there may be Beauty in Little Things, as well as in Great Things. Now we must come away, my dears.”

“But we haven't seen *half* the things in this lovely room!” they cried.

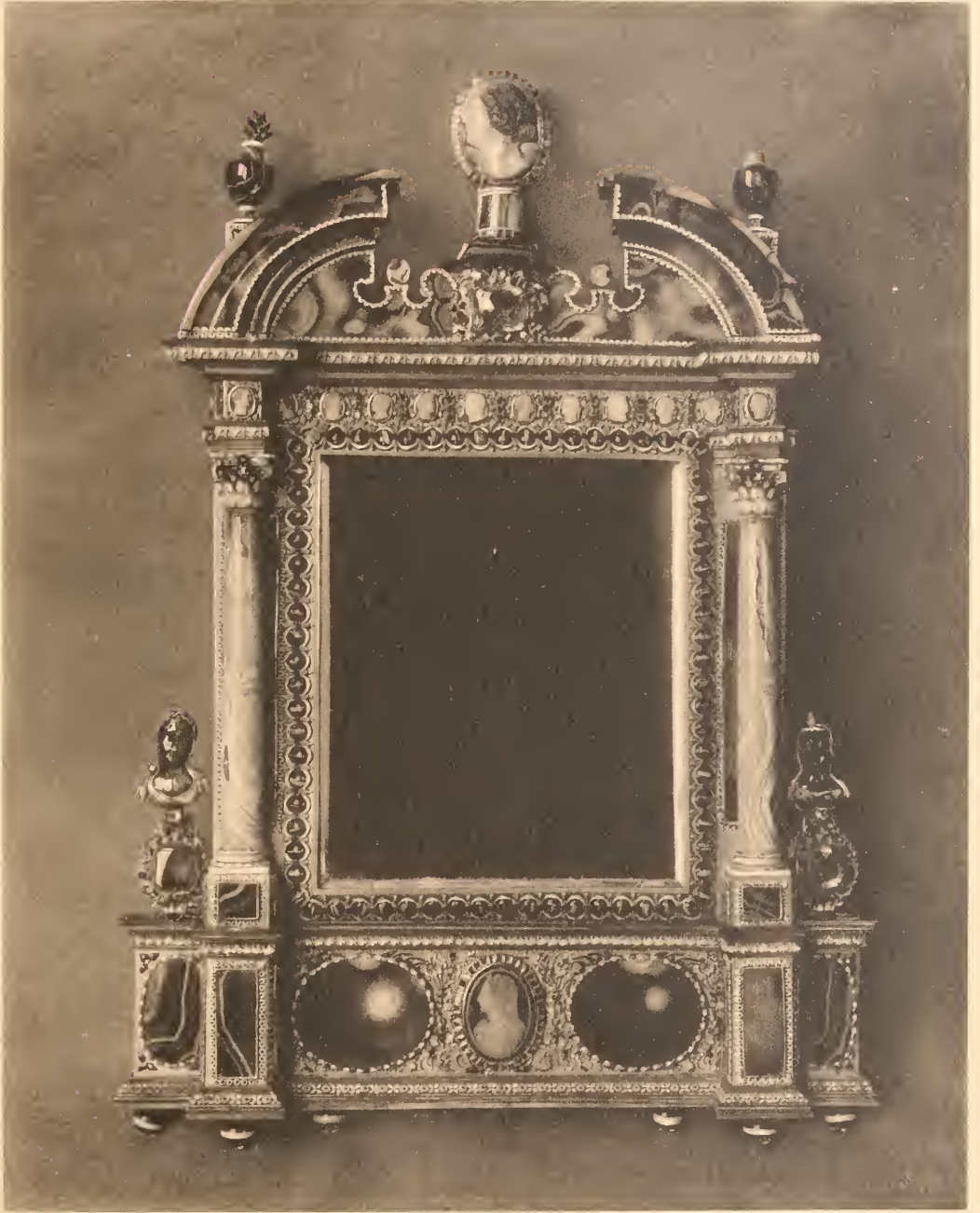
“We mustn't forget we are on our way to Italy,” said the Painter, “I'm afraid I must be stern and drag you away!”

The two children would have been quite ready to stay and learn more lessons at the Louvre, and they left school with real regret.

Walking back to the hotel another way, they passed the statue of a maiden in golden armour, on horseback, and bearing a banner.

“I know who that is!” said Marietta, a little of her mother's French blood bubbling up in her veins; “that's Joan of Arc, who beat the English!”

“Quite right,” said the Painter, smiling, “she helped you to



THE MIRROR OF MARIE DE MEDICI

beat us!" then seeing that Marietta was getting a little pink, he added quickly, "well, anyhow, it was a long time ago, and I believe we English admire Saint Jeanne, as she is now, as much as her own people do."

Nanny packed them off to bed directly after dinner; and though, in her dreams, Marietta had a hazy notion that the Winged Victory would keep trying to get on one of the whirling horses, both children woke up rested and happy when Nanny called them at six, and were all ready for the train.

CHAPTER IV

THE STORY OF BIMBO

The coach is at the door at last ;
The eager children, mounting fast
And kissing hands, in chorus sing
Good-bye, good-bye to everything!

R. L. STEVENSON.

WE all love a railway station. What boy hasn't made up his mind to drive an engine when he grows up?

Engine drivers seem such masters of the situation, as they lean with folded arms looking down from their iron rampart on the struggling mortals below.

Also, and we say it with bated breath, there is a rich tone, compounded of oil and coal dust, on their honest faces, which must appeal to the urchin, indignant from recent scrubbings.

Even the glories of a policeman's life fade before the grandeur of the being who knows the mysteries of a real engine, and who can silence the hiss of escaping steam, or let loose the piercing scream of the whistle, by the mere turn of his wrist.

* * * * *

"Attention! Attention!" cried a porter, and Yvette and Marietta who were watching a stoker do the most interesting tricks with a long snouted oil can, and a handful of cotton waste, jumped nimbly aside to let a ponderous trolley, piled high with luggage, go rumbling on down the platform.

The Painter had been careful to write beforehand, asking for seats to be reserved for his party, and this is the answer he received:

MONSIEUR,

J'ai l'honneur de répondre à votre lettre du 20 Septembre, et de vous

faire connaître que nous donnons des instructions pour qu'au train quittant Paris à 8 h le 25 courant, un compartiment de 2ème classe soit réservé afin de vous permettre de vous y installer avec votre famille.

Veuillez agréer, Monsieur, l'assurance de ma considération distinguée,

LE CHEF DE L'EXPLOITATION.

Which was satisfactory, wasn't it? But if you think I'm going to translate it for you, lazy little reader, you are very much mistaken.

"How lovely it is to be travelling like this," exclaimed Yvette, as she settled herself luxuriously in the corner seat nearest the window: "it's so different from other travelling! Here everybody is cheerful and smiling. The coachman said 'bon voyage,' as he drove off: he did really: I heard him!"

"If we weren't travelling with you," she explained, "we should first have had to wait in the hotel because the omnibus was late: and there would be a fuss with the gentleman who brought the bill, about something we hadn't really had."

"What an observant little woman you are," said the Painter with admiration.

"Then daddy would look cross and keep pulling out his watch; and mummy would say—I know we shall never catch that train—and baby would be sure to have a cold," continued Yvette, warming up to her subject; "and when we *did* get to the station we shouldn't get a porter, and daddy would have to get the boxes off the omnibus, and it would be raining, and the driver would say something rude about the money daddy gave him.

Then there would be a great crush and someone would tread on my foot. Yes, and there would be only three seats reserved instead of four, and a horrid man in the seat daddy had taken for mummy, and a fuss about getting him out of it; and even if the carriage was empty we should quarrel about corners; and . . ."

"My dear Yvette," expostulated the Painter . . . but she went on undaunted.

"And I remember a smart lady and gentleman with two little

girls who got into our carriage at Bluecliffe? The lady looked so cross and said, ' Did you see that the porter didn't put any heavy luggage on my hat box?' and he said, ' My dear, I couldn't be in two places at once, I was nearly left behind as it was,' and she went on, ' you would have looked after it all right if it had been your fishing rod or golf clubs.' "

" My dear Yvette," interrupted the Painter; " I really cannot allow this awful indictment of the grown-ups."

" Well, I was only telling you how much nicer it is to travel like this: and those two poor little children did look so frightened and unhappy!"

The train had passed the untidy outskirts which hang, like a torn and dirty fringe, round every great city, and was slipping smoothly between pale golden stubble fields, a few with the corn still standing in stooks, for harvest was late; but most of them with gleaners dotted over them, and with teams of powerful horses ploughing long brown gashes in the gold.

* * * * *

" Now, my dears," said the Painter, when they were tired of looking out of the window, " Marietta mustn't read in the train because of her eyes, so it would be selfish for the rest of us to bury ourselves in magazines. I vote we tell each other stories. Yvette shall begin and I'll come next."

And so it was agreed.

Yvette cleared her throat and began:

THE STORY OF BIMBO; OR, THAT FUNNY DOG

CHAPTER I

In a sunny farm-house, one afternoon, Bimbo saw light for the first time. He was nine days old, but his little eyes had not opened before.

When they did, he found he was cuddling close to his mother's

huge side. It looked ever so big to him, as he was very tiny. Suddenly the stable door opened and in strode a man, and Bimbo crept closer to his mother, wondering what this strange thing was. After the man came two children.

“ Oh,” cried one, “ are their eyes open yet, James?”

“ Yes, miss,” said the man, who had been bending over them, “ three have their eyes open, and the other two won't be long.”

“ Oh, how delightful!” cried the little girl, and she flopped down on her knees beside them.

“ Mind! Muriel,” said rather a cross, boyish voice, “ where do I come in?”

“ All right, Keith! Don't get impatient.”

“ Look at that *funny little dog*,” said Keith.

“ Yes,” cried Muriel, “ I was just looking at him. He really is funny!”

And that is how Bimbo first heard the expression he learned to hate.

CHAPTER II. THE ESCAPE.

Bimbo was white, all except the tip of his tail, his paws, and his nose, which were black.

Round each eye there was a black ring, which made him look as if he had been fighting. There was also a black stripe down his back. Pretty soon he became tired of being called “ funny dog.” People *would* say: “ Look at that funny dog!”

After a while it became unbearable; so whenever he heard people say “ that funny dog,” he used to creep behind boxes and things like that to hide. Only the kind grocer's boy called Bimbo by his real name.

One day he noticed that the garden gate was open. So he thought, “ Why shouldn't I go out through that gate and into the forest, and never come back again?”

He ran out of the gate, and hopped up the road at top speed. A few cottagers' children were playing on their doorsteps: and one

boy said, "That looks like Miss Muriel's funny little dog," and Bimbo thought, "Now I shall be caught." But the children only remarked, "Yes, he is funny!" and Bimbo breathed again.

After a few minutes he came to the forest, and squeezed between the brambles.

And thus his adventure began.

CHAPTER III. OLD MOTHER WATERCRESS.

Bimbo walked along the side of a stream which ran through the forest, sometimes drinking and sometimes resting.

Then he saw an old woman.

Now this old woman was known as Old Mother Watercress, for she gathered and sold watercress for a living. She looked up and saw Bimbo, and said: "Come here, doggie; poor doggie!"

So Bimbo went with her.

When the sun began to turn westward, Bimbo followed her home.

They soon came to a clearing in the forest, with a little hut in the middle. The old woman unlatched the door and walked in. Inside it was ever so clean; for the old woman was very tidy.

By this time Bimbo was nearly starving, and he was very pleased when she put on the kettle and brought out some cold meat, bread, and butter. He was even more pleased when a plate was put on the floor, filled with meat and gravy.

Bimbo ate until he was quite full; then he lay down and slept while she cleared away. First she washed up, then dried the things and put them in a cupboard: and after that washed the watercress she had gathered, ready for selling next morning.

Then she took her besom and swept the hut's one little room. And so began Bimbo's sojourn with Old Mother Watercress.

CHAPTER IV. HAPPINESS.

The children searched for him everywhere and at last gave him up as lost or killed or something horrible like that.

Meanwhile, Bimbo always went out with the old lady when she gathered cress.

One day as they were going home she gave a cry and fell. It had been raining the night before, and the ground was slippery: Bimbo sniffed round her uneasily, for she had fainted.

After a while she recovered, and said feebly: "Fetch help!"

Bimbo did not understand what this meant, but he puzzled it out in his little head, and thought: "This kind lady has hurt herself. When I hurt myself Edmund, the grocer's boy, cured me: so I'll go and fetch him."

So Bimbo trotted off to Edmund's little hut by the edge of the forest and found him sitting down to his tea. The cottage door was open, and Bimbo walked in. Edmund, hearing the pattering of tiny footsteps, looked round.

"Why, it's Bimbo!" he said, "where have you been all this time?"

Bimbo went up, wagging his stump of a tail, and tugged at his coat, then walked towards the door: he had to do this several times before Edmund understood. But when he did, he said to his father, "I'll see what Bimbo wants. If it's anything I will whistle."

He followed Bimbo into the forest to where the old lady lay.

Edmund whistled, and his father and mother came hurrying up.

"She has sprained her ankle," said his father. So they carried her home and Edmund's mother put her to bed.

* * * * *

Old Mother Watercress got better: but that was not all! She was to keep Bimbo, which was ever so nice!

And that is how Bimbo found happiness! said Yvette.

CHAPTER V

TITANIA'S PALACE

We travelled in the print of olden wars,
Yet all the land was green,
And love we found, and peace,
Where fire and sword had been.

R. L. STEVENSON.

IT was afternoon, and the train was steaming past the country round Belfort, the gallant little fortress which defied the Germans in the War of 1870, and remained unconquered to the last.

“Now it's your turn!” cried the two children eagerly: so the Painter began the story of:

TITANIA'S PALACE.

Titania had just come back from a flash round Kensington Gardens. Fairies, as you know, don't walk, and they don't exactly fly; they dart about like a dragon fly, and they call it “going out for a flash.”

She came into the fairy bower rather hot and tired.

“Obe,” she said, as she took off her dewdrop collar: she liked to call him “Obe” because it sounded American and up-to-date; “I've made a discovery!”

“You always were a clever darling,” said Oberon, as he helped her to arrange her wings comfortably on the sofa; he was very fond of Titania, but he didn't like her habit of calling him Obe; it sounded a little abrupt for a King!

“I've found out,” continued his consort, putting her feet up and smoothing down her gossamer; “that what children really like is

something made by humans. Not sunbeams, nor shadows, nor moonlight, nor those funny knotted tree trunks, all gnarled and twistyways, they always put in fairy books. No! They like toy engines, and boats, and motor-cars, and scooters; and what do you think they like best of all? Little girls, I mean."

"I must think that over," said Oberon, "just pass me my pollen box," and he took a pinch; "it clears the brain," he added, apologetically.

"It's a nasty habit, and I wish you would give it up. I'm always brushing your waistcoat petals," grumbled Titania. But her husband only sneezed.

"Let me think," he said, "what do little girls like best? I have it! Acid Drops," for he hadn't a very high opinion of the human child.

"You're quite wrong," said the Queen triumphantly, "they like Dolls-houses: yes, Dolls-houses with lots of tiny furniture in them."

"Well, after all," said Oberon, "you used to be rather fond of that kind of thing yourself. Don't you remember how we used to make little cottages out of pine-needles and moss, and stuck flowers round them for pretend gardens?" and he chuckled.

"I've been doing a lot of thinking," went on his wife, ignoring the interruption, "and I've come to the conclusion that something must be done to revive the children's interest in Fairies. Why, we don't get a good notice in the papers once in six months."

"Just touch the hare-bell," she went on, "it's past five o'clock and I'm longing for a cup of thyme honey."

"Yes," she exclaimed, after a pause; "it's high time we engineered a Stunt!"

"My dear! My dear! What an expression!" groaned the King, "and I don't quite see the connection between your discovery in Kensington Gardens and a Stunt. Horrible word!"

"Oh, but the discovery led to a brilliant idea," she said, as she took a calyx from the honey bee in waiting, and sipped it. "We *must* interest the children in our doings. They are so lazy nowadays that

they never get up in the moonlight to see our dances round the toad stools; and how many children know a fairy ring when they see it?

There is no help for it: we must have a Palace:" and she said it in so determined a tone that Oberon could only murmur: "But, my dear, consider the expense."

"We *must* have a Palace," she repeated with decision, "and it must be open to human children at least three days in the week; the State Rooms only, of course. As to expense, it isn't going to cost us a penny."

"Well, my dear," said Oberon, much relieved, "if you get our Palace built for nothing, you will be a cleverer little woman than I ever thought you. We certainly cannot afford any extra expense just now, with the Taxes and Cost of Living what they are. Why, only yesterday I had to pay eleven raspberries extra for that little bit of mossy bank we rent from old Mother Hedgehog; and even then she was quite spiny about it. And the Queen Bee says she must charge another clover plant for the calyx you are drinking now."

That very evening Titania put her plan into action. She flashed into a comfortable room, where two humans, husband and wife, were sitting, comfortable and drowsy after dinner, one on each side of the fireplace.

The Fairy Queen lighted on tiptoe on the back of the armchair, close to the husband's ear, for he was an old friend of hers.

A long time ago she had a country home in Ireland, pleasantly situated in a beech wood, at the foot of an old sycamore. She was so fond of this home of hers, for Ireland was quite different in those days, that she asked the Man, one moonlit evening, if he would draw a picture of it for her.

"Something really like it," she said, "not one of the pictures those long-haired youths and bob-haired maidens paint, and which look equally well whichever way you set them up."

"I'm afraid it won't be fashionable, ma'am," he had objected. . . .



QUEEN TITANIA'S COUNTRY HOME

“ Why did he call her ‘ ma’am,’ ” asked Marietta, “ I thought people always called Queens ‘ Your Majesty.’ ”

“ I used to think so too,” said the Painter, “ but the Man knew better, you see ; Queens and Princesses are called ‘ Ma’am ’ by people like you or me.”

“ Oh, do go on,” said Marietta, “ it’s a lovely story.”

“ Let us see, where was I? Oh yes :

. . . “ It won’t be fashionable,” he said, “ and people will make fun of it when they see it, and call it Preraphaelite and all sorts of long names, meant to be rude.”

But Titania insisted. So for many days the Man sat at his easel in front of that old sycamore, while she sat on the end of the cross-piece on which his drawing board rested, and watched him. And she wouldn’t let him leave out a single leaf on the laurel which grew in front of the door.

But where is the door? you may well ask, when you look at the picture. Of course, Fairies never let you see the door they go in and out by. Why, you little sillies, all sorts of undesirable things, like wasps and spiders, might want to come in too! So it’s always kept secret, and, although the Man knew very well where it was, he never let it out.

Titania was so pleased with his picture, that, when it was done, she conferred upon him her Order of the Fairy Kiss, which, as you ought to know, is the highest decoration a mortal can receive. You can always tell the people who have it, because, according to the Statutes, they are bound to wear the insignia in their mind’s eye all the time, and it makes them quite different from other people.

Now you know why the Fairy Queen came to the Man while he was having forty winks.

“ I want your help,” she whispered ; but he only gave a bubbling kind of little snort, which made his wife look up and smile.

Then he suddenly realized who was speaking ; “ I beg your pardon, ma’am,” he murmured, “ what was it you said?”

“ I want you to build me a Palace.”

The Man nearly woke up! “ W-a-n-t m-e t-o b-u-i-l-d y-o-u a P-A-L-A-C-E!!” he repeated, just like that.

“ But I’m not an Architect!” he objected.

“ It’s not the least good your making excuses,” said Titania firmly; “ you said you were only a poor ignorant soldier when you made that drawing of our Irish home; but we were quite pleased with it.”

“ But you want somebody who is a carpenter, and a decorator, and a builder, and a stonemason, and a woodcarver, and a plumber, and a potter, and a silversmith, and a . . . but you haven’t a notion, ma’am, what a lot of different craftsmen it takes to make a Palace. Besides, my eyes are not so young as they were, and there will be a lot of minute work to do.”

“ Oh, I leave all the details to you,” she said, airily, “ and as for your eyes, I will make them Knights of the Fairy Touch.” And she laid her wand lightly on each lid. “ Oberon shall confirm the honour when I see him. I’ll be back in a day or two to see the plans.”

“ Please wait a moment, give me some idea . . .” began the Man. But she flashed off, just touching the tip of his nose with her foot, which woke him up.

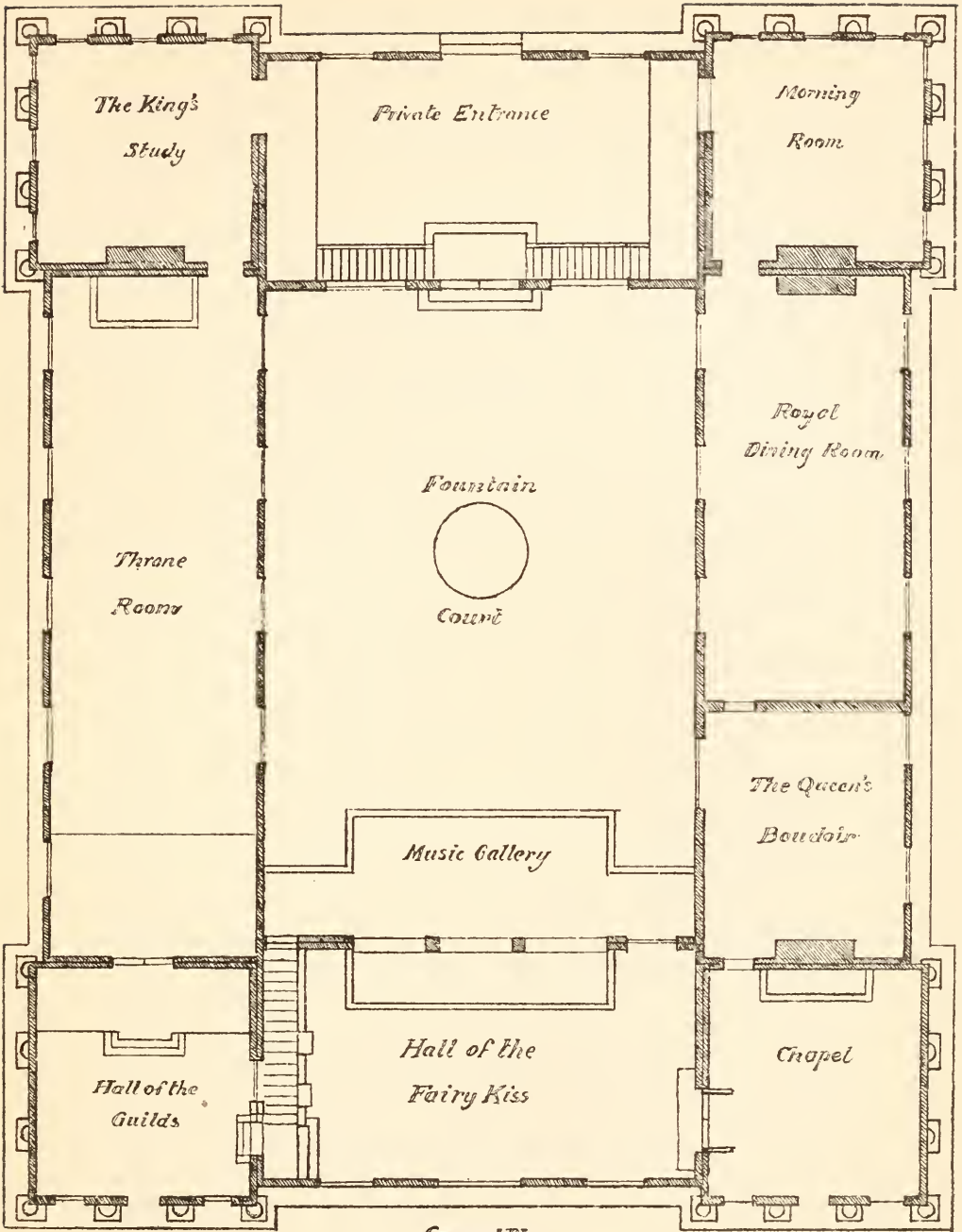
“ My dear,” said his wife, “ how you *have* been snoring.”

The Man didn’t tell her about Titania’s visit, because, though she was a very good wife to him, and he loved her very much, she didn’t like poetry. And it’s no good talking about Fairies to people who don’t like poetry, because they never really understand them.

And now, my dear children, if I told you all about the Palace that the Man built, we should be at Lucerne before I was half-way through.”

“ Do tell us something about it,” pleaded Yvette.

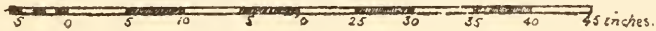
“ Well then, come and sit closer to me and I’ll show you a picture of the first part that he finished, the Entrance Hall or Vestibule, which he called the Hall of the Guilds. But the great Hall of the



Ground Plan

TITANIA'S PALACE

NEVILLE WILKINSON
G.C.F.K.



Fairy Kiss, the Throne Room, the Chapel, and all the other rooms will have to wait until we are travelling together somewhere else."

"What a huge Palace it must have been, if that was only the Vestibule," said Marietta; "what a long time it must have taken to build."

"All buildings take a long time, there are so many different things to think of," said the Painter.

"First of all the Man drew out his design very carefully on paper, for that is the way all Architects must begin. This takes a long time, and you cannot be too careful with the first plan, because everything depends on it.

When the drawing was finished he took it to an old friend of his, who was also a Knight of the Fairy Touch, and who worked wonders with wood. He was really a cabinet maker called James Hicks and lived in Dublin. He used to put on his cards 'Maker of Antique Furniture,' which was quite funny, though perhaps you don't see why.

At any rate Mr. Hicks, and his assistant, Tommy Lennon, and the Man put their heads together, and the framework was sawn and chiselled and carved and screwed, until it was like the drawing.

But it wasn't nearly finished then; it was only a shell, like an empty box, and no self-respecting Fairy would have dreamed of living in it, let alone a Queen.

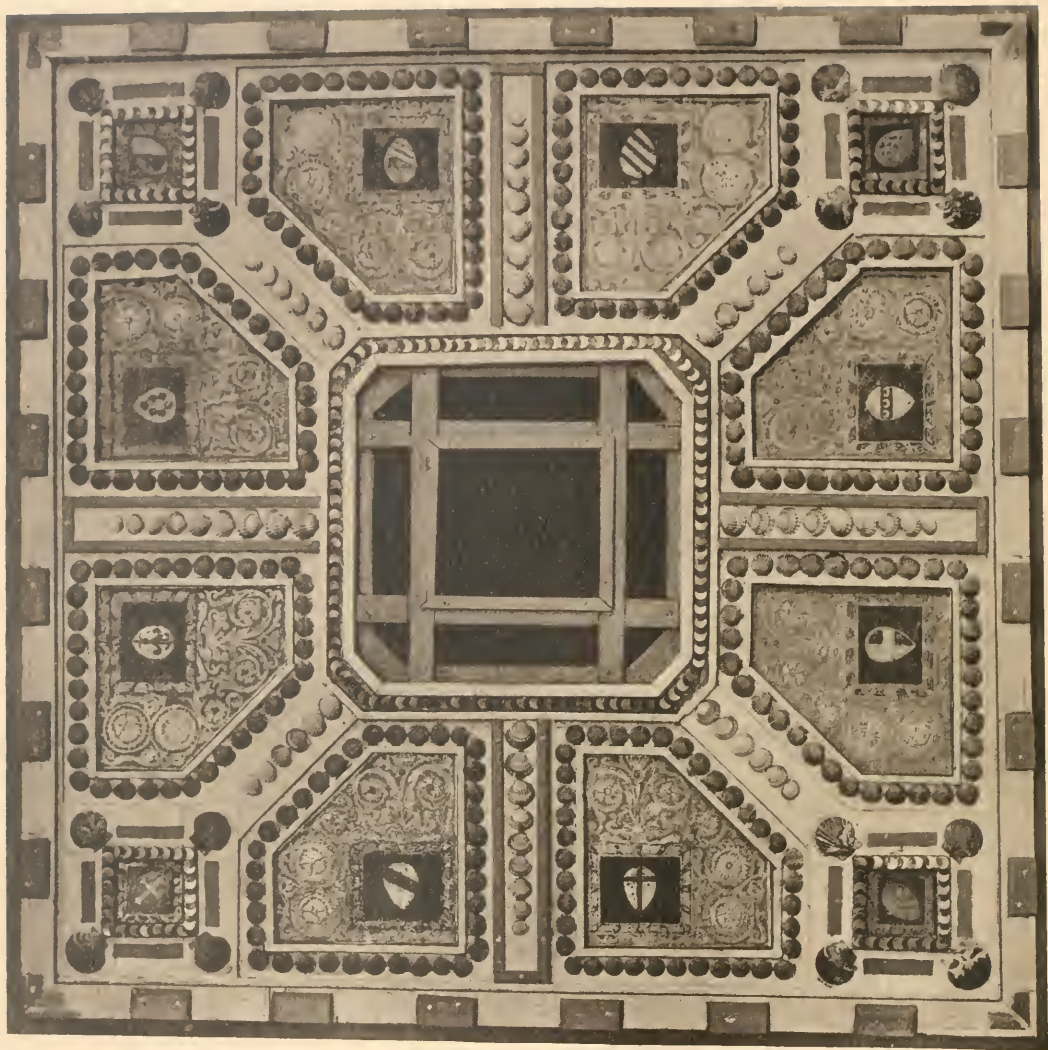
Then the Man set to work to decorate the interior, in order that it might be fit for the Court of Oberon and Titania.

He laid the floor of the Entrance Hall, which you see here, with tiny marble squares, black and white, cut and polished for him in Torquay.

Panels of Connemara marble, of a misty green, lined the walls as far as a Fairy might reach. Next above them came broad pieces of tapestry, framed in golden mosaic: in each were Fairy Maidens holding shields of Arms. Arms of the famous Guilds of Florence which flourished in the days long gone by, when the craftsman loved his craft and the City honoured the craftsman.



THE HALL OF THE GUILDS



THE CEILING

You will meet these same shields again in Florence, these ensigns of the Guilds. Woolcombers, weavers, dyers, silversmiths, workers in silk, armourers, carvers and gilders, you will find them all there.

Then, as your eye travels upwards, a broad band of tiles divides you from the coving; green, blue, and golden tiles, such as you may see in Spain. Above he made a ceiling, with twelve recesses bordered with gilded shells, picked up on the southern shores of Brittany; and in each recess he painted the Coat of Arms of some famous Florentine family—Alighieri, Buonarroto, Strozzi, Buondelmonte, and the rest. Dreadfully long names, aren't they? I wonder if the first two suggest any great men to my hearers.

Dante, the greatest poet of Italy, was an Alighieri, just as you, Yvette, and you, Marietta, bear the name your father gave your mother on their Wedding day.

Dante Alighieri was his full name; Buonarroto was Michel Angelo's surname; you've heard of him I'm sure.

At the far end of the Hall the Man built a raised platform of inlaid woods, cunningly wrought by a fellow Knight of the Fairy Touch, who worked at his craft beside the beautiful Lake of Geneva. You will find the Arms of Florence and the Medici on the platform."

"There seems to me to be a lot more about Florence than there is about Fairies!" remarked Marietta, "did Titania approve of all this?"

"Well, you see, it was this way: whenever the Man thought of Fairyland, he couldn't help thinking of Venice and Florence: but Titania didn't want the Palace made like a Venetian one, because she was afraid it might be damp for the children, so he had to fall back on Florence."

"And that's where we are going," cried Yvette joyfully, "how lovely, if it's really like Fairyland!"

"Why, bless me, here we are at Bâle!" exclaimed the Painter, "and poor Marietta hasn't had a chance of getting her story in at all.

Never mind, we can hear it some other time, can't we? Now bustle up, for we have to change here and wait quite a long time."

So they collected all their traps and left them to the care of the Swiss porter.

"Now we're actually in Switzerland," said the Painter. "The town of Bâle is divided by the Rhine into two parts, as London is by the Thames, and Dublin by the Liffey. The smaller part is German and called Basel; the larger part, in which are all the fine buildings, hotels, churches, museums, and the like, is Swiss. But, dear me, I'm getting just like a Geography book! Let's come for a walk before dinner. It's too late to see the Holbein pictures in the Museum; but there's a little bit of mediaeval humour I want you to see."

"What is mediaeval?" asked Marietta.

"It means made in the Middle Ages," said Yvette, "when the ladies used to wear pointed caps, and veils down their backs; when people in armour went to Jerusalem with Crosses on their shields." For she really did know a little History.

So the party went off gaily up the narrow cobbled streets, past houses built centuries ago, to the Minster. There, on the left of the big door, the Painter pointed out a figure of Saint George on his war-horse, on a stone bracket: the Saint has his lance at the charge, and such a lance! It goes all across the bare wall until you wonder where it will end: then to your astonishment, you find it disappearing down the gullet of a poor lonely little dragon, like a fat chicken, feebly flapping his wings on another stone bracket.

How the old sculptor must have chuckled when he made it!

Lamps were lighted as they walked down the hill to the Three Kings, the Inn where they were to have dinner.

From the windows of the hotel Yvette and Marietta had a good view of the swiftly flowing Rhine, with its picturesque bridges.

Nine o'clock found them once more in the train entering the last lap.



ST. GEORGE AT BÂLE

CHAPTER VI

THE FAIRY KISS AND THE MESSAGE

Oh! There are spirits of the air,
And genii of the evening breeze,
And gentle ghosts, with eyes as fair
As star-beams among twilight trees.

SHELLEY.

THE shadows were closing down as our travellers started on the last part of their journey, or, as athletes call the end of a race, the "last lap." The next day would see them fairly in Italy.

Although they were in another train, they were fortunate in still having a compartment to themselves.

"I felt sure we should," said Yvette, "because Marietta has to tell us *her* story."

"Please tell us a little more about the Fairy Palace before I begin," begged Marietta, "you hadn't finished properly when we got to Bâle."

"Let me see, I had just described the Hall of the Guilds, the first room to be decorated, hadn't I?"

Queen Titania was so pleased with the work as far as it had gone, that she decreed that all human children who wished to do so, were to be allowed to visit the Hall on High-days and Holidays. She further ordained that all the other rooms, as they were finished, should be thrown open to the public.

But many years passed before the Palace was fit to be inhabited by the Royal Princes and Princesses of Fairyland, for each room was more beautiful than the last."

"It must have taken a dreadfully long time," sighed Yvette, "did the Man finish it?"

“That remains to be seen,” said the Painter. Which, when you come to think of it, was a strange thing for *him* to say.

“But the Fairies only live there in the Winter time,” he added, “when it’s cosy and all lighted up with glow worms: for they still love dancing by moonlight when the nights are warm.”

“And it’s much better for the Fairy children to be in the fresh air in the Summer,” added wise Marietta.

“I know that the Palace makes children quite certain that there really are Fairies, and that’s what Titania wanted it for,” said Yvette conclusively.

I hope she is right.

“I wonder what the Man will be given when the Palace is finished,” said Marietta.

“I don’t think that Titania could do less than give him the Grand Cross of the Fairy Kiss,” said the Painter. “For all those who have this much-prized Order wear such a pretty Collar.”

“What do you mean by a Collar,” said Marietta, a little puzzled.

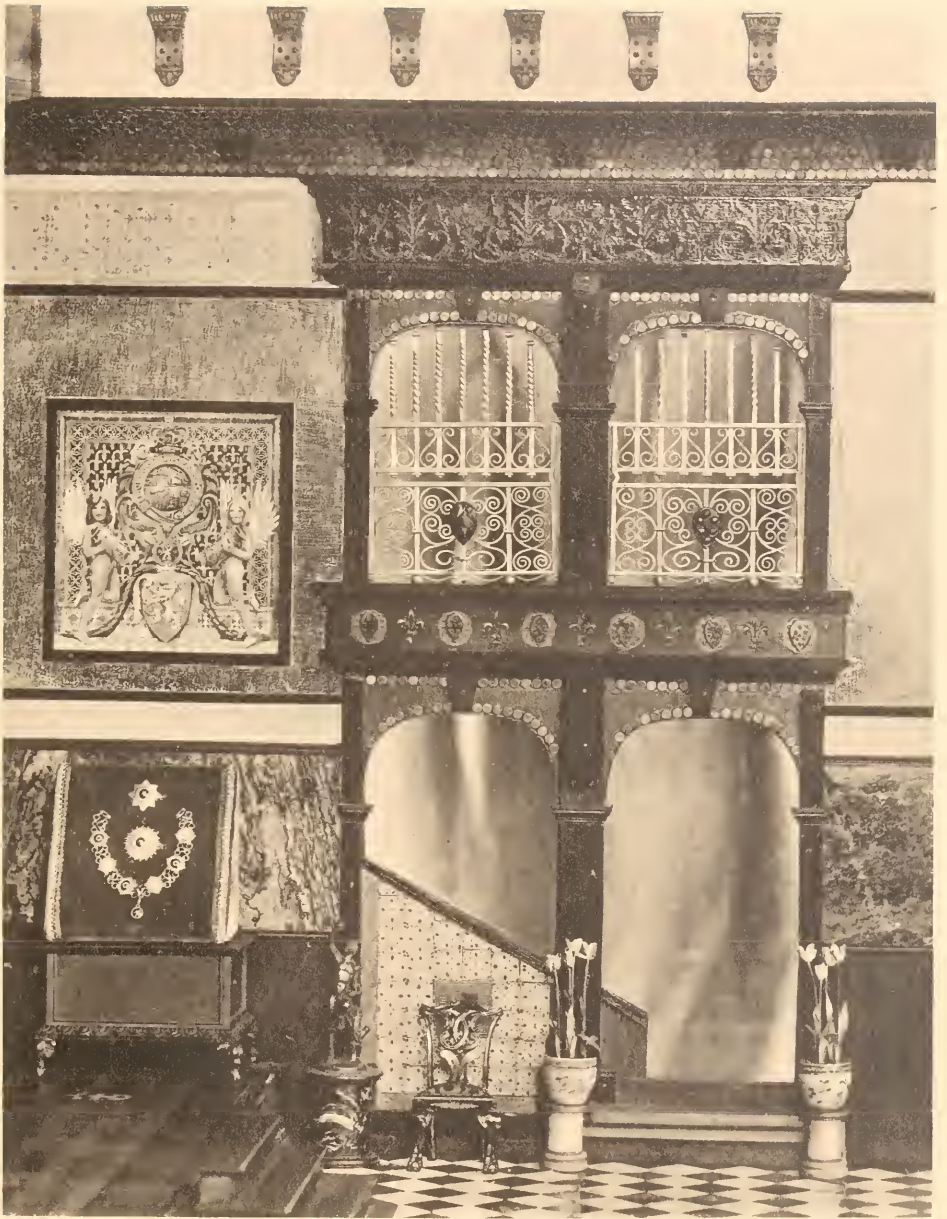
“Well, it is like this,” he explained. “The Most Industrious Order of the Fairy Kiss has three degrees. As in the Army you have Generals and Colonels and Captains, so in the Order you have Knights Grand Cross, Knights, and Companions. The Companion wears a badge only, round his neck, the Knight wears a Star as well, while the Grand Cross is given a lovely gold collar as well as the Badge and a special Star.”

“My papa is a Companion of something,” said Yvette, with proper pride. “He got it in the war.”

“My dear, don’t you think ‘was given it’ sounds better than ‘got it,’” said the Painter, “why, as you put it, it sounds like a disease.”

“I wish we could see the Collar and things,” sighed Marietta; “how lovely they must be, made by fairy jewellers! Can’t you tell us what they are like?”

“It’s really a dead secret,” whispered the Painter, “but if you both promise not to tell it to anyone, I will describe them to you.”



INSIGNIA OF THE FAIRY KISS

“ Oh, thank you,” they both cried at once, “ but what about the children who read the book?” added Yvette.

“ If they feel they cannot keep a secret, we must trust to their honour to skip the description.

The Insignia, as it is called, of the Most Industrious Order is like this:

Companions, who write C.F.K. after their names, wear a rainbow ribbon round their necks, from which hangs a crimson rose with a tiny diamond centre.

Knights (K.C.F.K.) wear in addition to this badge, a silver Star, with a crimson rose centre, round which is a band with the motto of the Order:

NIHIL SINE LABORE.”

“ And that means?” said Yvette.

“ Well, let me think: it means one cannot do anything worth doing without hard work: no, not even if one is a genius!

The Knights Grand Cross (G.C.F.K.) wear a Badge and Star just the same as the others. But they have, in addition, a gold Collar, made of the letters T. and O. linked together.

The Badge is fastened to the Collar.”

“ I know what the O. and the T. on the Collar stand for,” said Yvette; “ but I do wish you would draw all the things for us, you do draw so nicely.”

“ And so I suppose the poor Painter must make another design,” he sighed.

“ Can girls like me and Marietta get the Order too?” asked Yvette.

“ Certainly they can,” replied the Painter, “ you begin by being Rose Maidens, and you wear the Badge. Then, when you’ve done something really important to help the little children the Fairies love, you may be made Star Maidens of the Fairy Kiss, and then you rank with the Knights.”

“ Oh, I do hope we’ll get it,” said Marietta, anxiously, “ you must tell us what to do.”

“ The quickest way is to become a Member of the ‘ League of Pity,’ or the ‘ Children’s Union,’ because then you are doing good to other children. But in your case I’ve asked Queen Titania to make you both Rose Maidens. I’m expecting her to send me your Badges any day.”

“ How lovely!” cried both children at once. “ But what have we done to deserve it?” asked Marietta.

“ You tell the stories which help the Book,” said the Painter, “ and the Book helps Titania’s Palace, and Titania’s Palace helps the Fairies, and the Fairies help the Children.”

“ It sounds like the House that Jack built,” said Yvette.

“ Wasn’t there another Order Titania gave the Man?” asked Marietta; “ she touched his eyes with her wand, don’t you remember?”

“ Yes, that was the Fairy Touch; I will tell you all about that another time; it has a pretty badge, but it’s not nearly so important as the other.”

“ I shouldn’t have thought that the Insignia of a Fairy Order would have been made of gold and silver and enamel; one would think they would be little bits of moonbeam, and dewdrops, and things like that,” said Yvette, thoughtfully.

“ Well, you see, it’s because they are for human wear,” explained the Painter.

“ But you said they were worn in the mind’s eye,” she continued, still not quite convinced.

“ I think we had better change the subject,” said the Painter, “ especially as it’s high time Marietta told us her story!”

“ I’m afraid it’s only a little one,” said Marietta, “ and it’s about fairies too.”

And she began :

THE MESSAGE.

"This is very funny," said Frank, "wherever did you find it, Fay?"

"Oh, down by the cave, hardly three inches from the Fairy Ring," replied his sister.

"Why then," cried Frank, "it's a Fairy Message!" and, indeed, it was.

It was written on the tiniest piece of parchment imaginable, and the writing on it was so tiny, that the children had to screw up their eyes to read it.

"Well, what do you make of it?" asked Frank.

"I'm sure I don't know what it means; but I have an idea. You know that in father's study there is a magnifying glass. Perhaps that would help us. Anyway, we'll try," for Fay was rather a clever little girl, and the pride of her teacher's heart.

The two children ran into their father's study, and found the magnifying glass. They held it over the parchment and this is what they read:

To whosoever findeth this letter: I am in great danger, for I am caught in the web of a humpy grumpy spider.

He's going to keep me until the Feast of the spiders (which is on the last night of the moon), when he means to tell them of his intention of keeping me as a slave, which I am sure all the other tribes will approve.

If any kind mortal who understands about Fairies, and all about them, finds this letter, let her or him put it into the middle of a Fairy Ring, where my friends, or maybe my family, will find it. Please do all I ask as I am in danger!

Fairy Sybil.

"Well," said both the children as they finished reading, "we will do all we can to save her."

* * * * *

The cool green glades of Fairyland were alive with talk.

Sweet Fairy Sybil had disappeared. No, it wasn't on an errand to mortal land, because she would have told her parents, also Lord Hyacinth, where she was bound for.

That night Lord and Lady Hyacinth were giving a Ball. There

were a hundred Fairies coming, and about twenty frogs and insects for the Orchestra.

Lady Hyacinth was there first with her spouse. She went forward to inspect the floor, when she saw something white lying there.

It proved to be the Fairy Sybil's message.

Lady Blue Hyacinth read it over (also a Postscript which the children had written in their tiniest letters).

As you already know the contents of the Fairy's letter, I needn't say it all over again.

"I suppose you want to hear Frank and Fay's addition, though, don't you?" asked Marietta.

"Of course we do," said the Painter and Yvette together. So Marietta continued:

The Postscript said, *If you want any help, please be in Marshy Meadow at sunset to-morrow: our names are Fay and Frank. We would adore to come and help Fairy Sybil: Please let us.*

Fay, Frank.

Lady Blue took the letter to her husband, Lord Pink Hyacinth, and between them they decided that Lord Pink should go to Marshy Meadow, and take ten of the famous Pricker Army, in case the children meant to do harm.

These famous Prickers carried tiny spears, which could prick very hard, yes, even mortals!

* * * * *

Next evening the children were there early and so was Lord Pink. He talked to the children, nervously at first, but soon he got more used to them and he worked a charm on them which made them small.

Then they set off with the ten Prickers. They soon arrived at the rushes which surrounded Humpty's web.

Now I must tell you that before they set out Fay insisted on bringing a lovely pair of silver scissors that had been given her by a fond aunt.

"Whatever do you want those for?" asked Frank.

“ Well,” said Fay, “ the letter said she was caught in a web, doesn't it? So I want these to let her out.”

“ Don't be so silly,” said Frank, “ what about my knife?”

“ But I'm bringing the scissors,” said Fay, and so the matter ended.

As they neared the web, they heard sounds of weeping; then an evil voice saying: “ Aha! my pretty! you may as well weep. To-morrow nears your doom!”

“ That's Humpy Grumpy I'll be bound,” whispered Frank.

“ Sh!” said his sister, “ they might hear you!”

Just then Lord Pink turned to them and said: “ We are going to rush the web.”

“ Ooh! how lovely!” said Frank, but Fay said nothing. She was not quite sure if she liked rushing wicked spiders' webs.

They crept round the bushes, and saw a great stout web, and in it a poor little Fairy, and beside her a great wicked spider.

Lord Pink gave the word “ Go!” and immediately there was a rush, and before Humpy could say a word, he found himself bound and surrounded by ten of the dread Prickers. He was then marched off by five of them, a much sadder and wiser spider.

Then the others tried to free Fairy Sybil, but try as they would they could not break the web.

Frank slashed at it with his knife, Lord Pink tore at it with his hands, and the five Prickers pricked it with their spears. Suddenly Fay, who had not been taking part in this, stepped forward, while everybody turned to look at her, even the Fairy in the web.

She drew out her scissors and, snip snap, the web lay in bits at their feet. •

Little Fairy Sybil stepped out of the ruins with a sweet smile on her lips.

* * * * *

When they arrived home, everyone was joyful, messages were sent to the Fairy Queen, and her answer was, “ Give them the Freedom

of Fairyland." Which meant they could come and go when they wished: and they often had happy times with the Fairies.

"And that's the end," said Marietta.

"I propose that we pass a vote of thanks for the story," said the Painter. "You'll second it I know, Yvette; and Nanny shall carry it unanimously."

But Nanny was sound asleep.

A comfortable Hotel Omnibus met them at Lucerne Station, but both children were too sleepy to notice the beautiful wavy reflections of the lamps, dancing on the quiet surface of the lake. They drove over a bridge and round to a great Hotel blazing with electric light; and I can assure you that Nanny didn't have to sing the two children to sleep that night.

"Look at that great jagged mountain opposite," cried Yvette as they ran to the window of their bedroom the next morning: "and what a lovely lake! Do look at that big steamer just moving off; I can see it through the trees."

They were funny little stumpy trees too: cut down close at the top so that the branches spread out and formed a shady avenue round the end of the lake.

But it is no good attempting to describe the glory of early morning at Lucerne, for those who have been there can better picture it for themselves, while those who haven't will not really be any the wiser for reading a long description of lake, mountain, and sky. No! nobody has been able to describe it yet, and *I'm* not going to try!

It was not very long before the party found themselves in the train again, puffing slowly and heavily up the valleys which lead to the famous Saint Gothard Pass. Right up among pine-clad slopes and giant cliffs they climbed; through avalanche galleries, and past torrents dashing headlong over slippery rocks down into the valleys below, so far below that the falls became mere jets of streaming spray long before they reached their goal.

Then with a plunge and a roar into the famous tunnel.

“ Now, as we shall see nothing at all for about half an hour,” said the Painter, “ we may just as well eat our luncheon. It seems strange to think we are thundering through more than nine miles of solid rock.”

A blaze of sunshine announced their arrival at Airolo, the Southern exit of the famous burrow.

“ Now for Bellinzona, Lugano, the Lakes, and Italy,” cried the Painter cheerily.

“ We are a long time getting to Florence,” said Yvette, who was beginning to get a little tired of the journey: “ don't you think that we might sort of suddenly arrive?”

“ But, my dear, think of the Italian Lakes! Think of the excitement of seeing the great plain of Lombardy with its rows of vines festooned between dwarf mulberry trees. The quiet white oxen drawing carts with solid wooden wheels, as they did in the time of Michel Angelo. Think of the stone-built farm-houses, with the curious peacock blue blush on their venerable whitewashed walls, the stain from the copper liquid used to spray the vines which overhang them.

Then think of the grey foothills of the Apennines, the slow climb up and the run down into the valley of the Arno.”

“ Marietta and I do so want to see the Torre della Pace and the people in it, please let's get there quickly. I'm sure Nanny wants us to have a rest, and that only takes about a line, you know. Just say ‘ Nanny thought after so much excitement and fatigue the two children should rest, so I am obliged to skip the beautiful country between Lugano and Florence ’: won't that do?”

“ If you're not too tired we can go straight through without stopping at Milan,” said the Painter: “ but it will mean sleeping a night in the train and arriving very early at the Torre. I can send them a telegram.”

“ Yes, that will be best of all,” the children agreed.

And that is how we get so quickly to Florence.

CHAPTER VII

THE ARRIVAL

Hark to the song of greeting!
The tall trees
Murmur their welcome in the
Southern breeze.

CHRISTINA ROSSETTI.

THERE was a white morning mist hanging in the streets of Florence as the party left the station. Santa Maria Novella was veiled from view, and none of the familiar landmarks was visible.

The children were a little disappointed at their entry into the promised Fairyland: but the Painter was glad to think that his dear City of Flowers should not be first seen by tired eyes. He would far rather that Yvette and Marietta should wake to their first impression of its beauties when they were rested and refreshed after their long journey.

As the carriage, with its two lean horses, jingled slowly up the steep ascent to San Domenico, glimpses of blue sky could be faintly seen between wisps of vapour: presently the tall cypress trees which line the road loomed out in all their solemn grandeur, like giant policemen.

Then, as they turned off the main road into a narrow Viale, or lane, the full glory of the Italian sun burst upon them. The country below them was still veiled in its white garment of mist, but one could see, far away, like giant fingers pointing to Heaven, the graceful towers of Florence.

“Look at the flowers!” cried Yvette in ecstasy, as the carriage

passed an overhanging wall, over which poured a cascade of crimson roses.

“ I think that must be the beginning of our property,” said the Painter : “ yes, here we are at last : welcome to your Italian home !”

The tired horses, the journey done, stretched their bony necks and shook themselves, until the collar of little bells they wore jingled madly.

The coachman, throwing his reins on the horses' backs and jumping down, rang a joyous peal on a bell whose long twisted handle hung down from a riot of scarlet geranium.

The two children sprang out and, peeping through the tall iron gates, saw a bent old man, clad in picturesque rags and wearing a battered straw hat, coming across the flagged courtyard. “ That must be Carlo,” they whispered : and so it was.

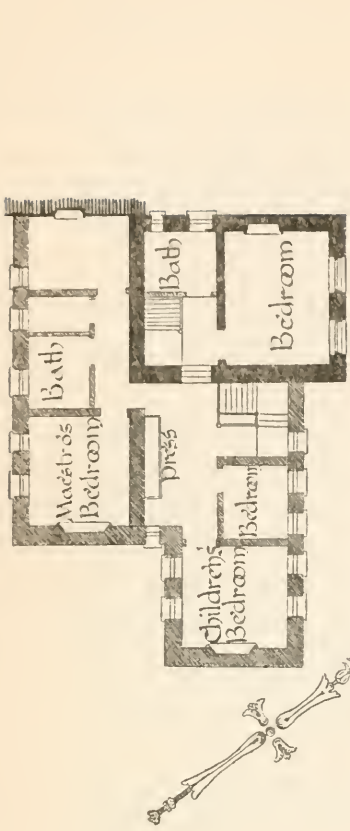
A smile of welcome lighted up the old gardener's seamed and wrinkled face as he saw the new Signor Padrone. Everything, it appeared, was in order in the establishment : Margherita the cook was well, and had provided herself with another “ *donna di cucina* ” : the last. . . .

But the Maestro, for so we shall call him in future, firmly quenched the recital of the iniquities of the late kitchen maid, which Carlo was beginning in his rich Tuscan dialect, and which threatened to keep the eager party halted at the gate.

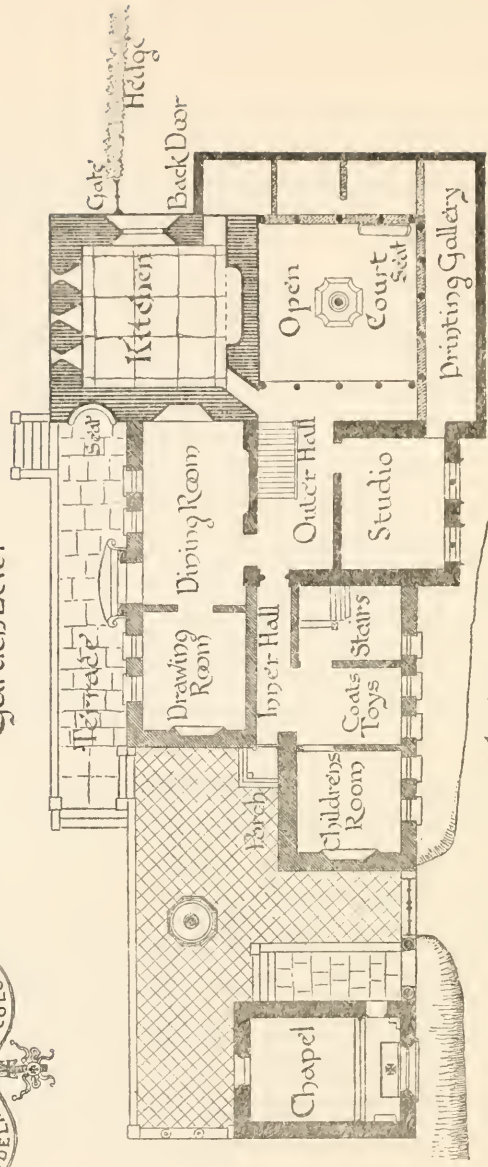
The Porch of the Torre della Pace, as you will see by the plan, was cosily tucked away in a corner, not visible from the iron gate : standing under it they found an old woman with an orange handkerchief tied over her grey locks. She was calling loudly to someone in the house, and presently a buxom servant girl hurried out, made a courtesy to the Signor Padrone, and relieved Nanny of the bundles she was carrying.

The Maestro introduced the two girls to Margherita Faraldo, for she it was who welcomed them at the door of the house.

“ Well, children,” said the Maestro, when Yvette and Marietta,



Garden Level



The Viale

TORRE DELLA PACE



flushed and happy, rejoined him in the drawing-room: "do you think we shall be comfortable here?"

"We simply can't sit still," said Yvette, "we're longing so to go all over the house!"

"And the garden," added Marietta: "our bedroom is lovely, with such flowers in it!"

"Don't eat up all your happiness at one bite," said the Maestro with a smile: "we hope to be here for a whole year, so you'll have plenty of time to investigate."

"We must be quick and learn Italian," cried Yvette, "I am longing to understand all that Bella and Margarita and Carlo are saying."

"If you really make up your minds to learn," said the Maestro, "I shall soon hear you chattering away even to old Carlo, whose Tuscan dialect is not easy for me to understand. You will find plenty of grammars and dictionaries, all very much at your service, in the big bookcase in the Studio."

"And now I'll tell you a piece of news which will interest you," he continued, "I've thought out the scheme and subject for the big picture you are to help me paint. You two, of course, will be in it, but before we make a start, we must find two other children. We want a little boy of about four, with golden hair and dimples, and a little girl of about six or seven, just as pretty as she can possibly be!"

"Oh, do tell us what the Picture is going to be like," cried Yvette, "what is it to be called?"

"There will be a group arranged on the marble seat which you can see from the Studio door; the other side of the Fountain Court. Cupid will be standing on the seat, with only his little quiver slung over his shoulder, and his bow in his right hand: he will be turning a little towards Marietta, and throwing a rose down at her. She will be crouching forward with her hand raised to ward it off: rather a difficult position to keep, I'm afraid!"

"I daresay I shall manage all right," said Marietta confidently,

“ I’ve done some awfully twisty ones before now. But what does Yvette do?”

“ Yvette will sit at the other end of the seat, in profile, looking up and laughing at Cupid. She will have her arm round the little girl we have still to find. On the ground beside them will be a big basket of roses, and there will be others strewed on the seat. In the corner above Marietta will be an orange tree, with golden fruit, growing out of a big majolica pot like the one in the frontispiece.

The picture will be called CUPID’S COURT. If some rich American will only come and buy it, perhaps we three may go off together somewhere else and paint another!”

“ Oh, I do hope that someone will!” cried Yvette, “ but all the same we shall be jolly sorry when it is done. I nearly cried when my portrait was finished, and you didn’t want me to sit any more. You used to tell such interesting stories that I simply loved sitting.”

“ What shall we wear?” asked Marietta.

“ My idea is to have you both dressed in a kind of cream white silk tunic, with a deep gold fringe: something rather Greek in style. The material must be heavy enough to lie in straight folds. I think it had better be looped up a little round the waist by a flat woven gold band. I hope you understand what I mean, for I’m not a good dressmaker! I want your limbs as free as possible, but perhaps we may find sandals useful.

Marietta will have—let me see—yes, I think a fillet, as they call it, in her hair, while you, Yvette, will have a wreath of tiny flowers.

Of course this is only the rough outline; all the details will mean careful work, and I’m afraid many rather wearisome sittings for my little guests. But before we do anything else we must set off on a voyage of discovery to find Cupid himself, and the little maiden to add to his Court.”

“ It sounds to me as if it was going to be lovely!” said Yvette.

CHAPTER VIII
THE TORRE DELLA PACE

Half way up
He built his house, whence, as by stealth, he caught
Among the hills, a glimpse of busy life,
That soothed, not stirred.

ROGERS.

“**D**O *please* take us all round the house, and tell us all you know about it,” said Yvette one morning, shortly after their arrival. “I know there must be lots of interesting things; there are so many queer carved stones in the old-looking part; and we found that there were pillars and arches right in the wall of your Printing Gallery. The part we live in looks quite, quite different to Margherita’s kitchen and the open bit round the fountain.”

“Come along and let’s go on a voyage of discovery,” said the Maestro. “I will tell you all about the different parts of the house as we go; that is, of course, all I have been able to pick up about it out of old books and manuscripts, for there is much that I don’t know. First of all I can tell you that the oldest part of the Torre is the great Kitchen. I will take you there now.”

So they started off together to invade Margherita’s domain.

“I fancy this must have been built about the time that the mediaeval sculptor carved the comic Dragon we saw at Bâle,” said the Maestro, when he had explained to the old lady the object of their visit. “That must be some seven hundred years ago.”

“My! that’s a long time,” said Marietta, with wide open eyes.

“Yes,” he continued, “I expect it was just a square tower on the side of the hill, built of hewn stones taken from some ruin of Roman,

or even Etruscan, work. The walls are wonderfully thick, as you can see, and were capable of keeping off the robbers who threatened the dwellers outside city gates in those days.

Only think! Margherita cooks your dinner on the same hearth, a little modernized, it is true, but made of the same stones which must have seen burly Tuscans in polished steel breastplates and leather jerkins, testing the joint, which turned on the spit, with their daggers. The old kitchen must have seen rough times when it was young!

About a hundred years later a young nobleman of Florence, of the famous family of Buondelmonte, must have bought the tower: for he built an open colonnade and another large building as an addition to it.

You can see exactly how far the new buildings extended by looking at the Plan. The Buondelmonte wing is now the Studio, the Printing Gallery, and the Store Room; it runs all round the open Courtyard, where Cupid's Court will be painted."

"How did you find out about what was built such a long time ago?" asked Yvette.

"If you look carefully at the doorway leading from the Courtyard into the Store Room, you will see over the lintel two carved Coats of Arms.

By this we know that some member of the family of Buondelmonte built the doorway and, as it were, set his seal upon it. They were very jealous indeed about their Coats of Arms in those days, and no one but a true descendant of the family to which they had been given would dare to use them.

Luckily the young gentleman was married at the time he built the new wing, so we find a second shield with his wife's Arms put along with his own; she was one of the Piccolomini family of Siena. I say luckily, because we can easily find out from the old marriage records when the wedding of Mister Buondelmonte to Miss Piccolomini took place. As a matter of fact, my friend discovered that it was in the year 1382.

It was probably a love match, because, if I remember rightly, the cities of Florence and Siena were not at all friendly in those days: perhaps that was why he bought such a strong little castle to bring his bride to."

"That makes it all the nicer, doesn't it?" said Yvette.

"I think myself that the Chapel was built about the same time," he went on: "but unfortunately the Buondelmonti were much too important to lie buried in such a little bit of a place: they preferred the

' Long drawn aisles and fretted vaults '

that our poet Gray talks about. So there are no tombs to give us a clue to the date.

I never could make out why the marble flagged terrace was built along the side of the Chapel, on the left of the iron gates. There is a little door at the end of it leading into the East end, but the architect could have simply made a couple of steps up to it. There was no real necessity for a broad terrace with a marble balustrade.

I think it must have been because all the good architects of the olden time knew the charm of the unexpected. Nowadays, my dears, you will find many people who think that every feature of a building must exactly match some other feature; people who design big public buildings are often the worst offenders. Oh, the dreary sameness of their long pillared fronts!

I really believe that some architects, if they had been asked to design a man, would have given him a liver on each side, for the sake of symmetry! Ah, my dears, you are fortunately young enough not to know what that would have meant to the human race!

But to return to Buondelmonte's Colonnade: it must have been a kind of Cloister running round two sides of the Courtyard, and was afterwards turned into a stable!

The open arches were bricked up and the marble flags were hidden under a layer of earth and litter.

I fancy some honest farmer must have bought the estate about the time that our King Charles I was on the throne.

But you must tell me if you get tired of so much history."

"Oh, I love it," said Yvette, "and I know Marietta does too. You see it seems to make all the rooms and doorways and walls like old friends. And one can imagine such a lot of stories about them. Beautiful ladies with mirrors like the one we saw in the Louvre, and such lovely children playing about in the Courtyard. Even when it was only a farm it must have been full of all kinds of animals, nice ones like horses and ponies and dogs and cats."

"And I'm sure the children had guinea-pigs: I love guinea-pigs," sighed Marietta, "they make such a funny little squeaking noise."

"In those days," went on the Maestro, "the Studio part was probably used as a barn, for it got into a very bad state of repair. There is little of the old building to be seen in it now.

Luckily, the windows are big and face the North, as Studio windows should, so it wasn't necessary to alter them."

"What are those funny lumps sticking out of the wall over our heads?" asked Yvette. "They look as if the ends had been carved."

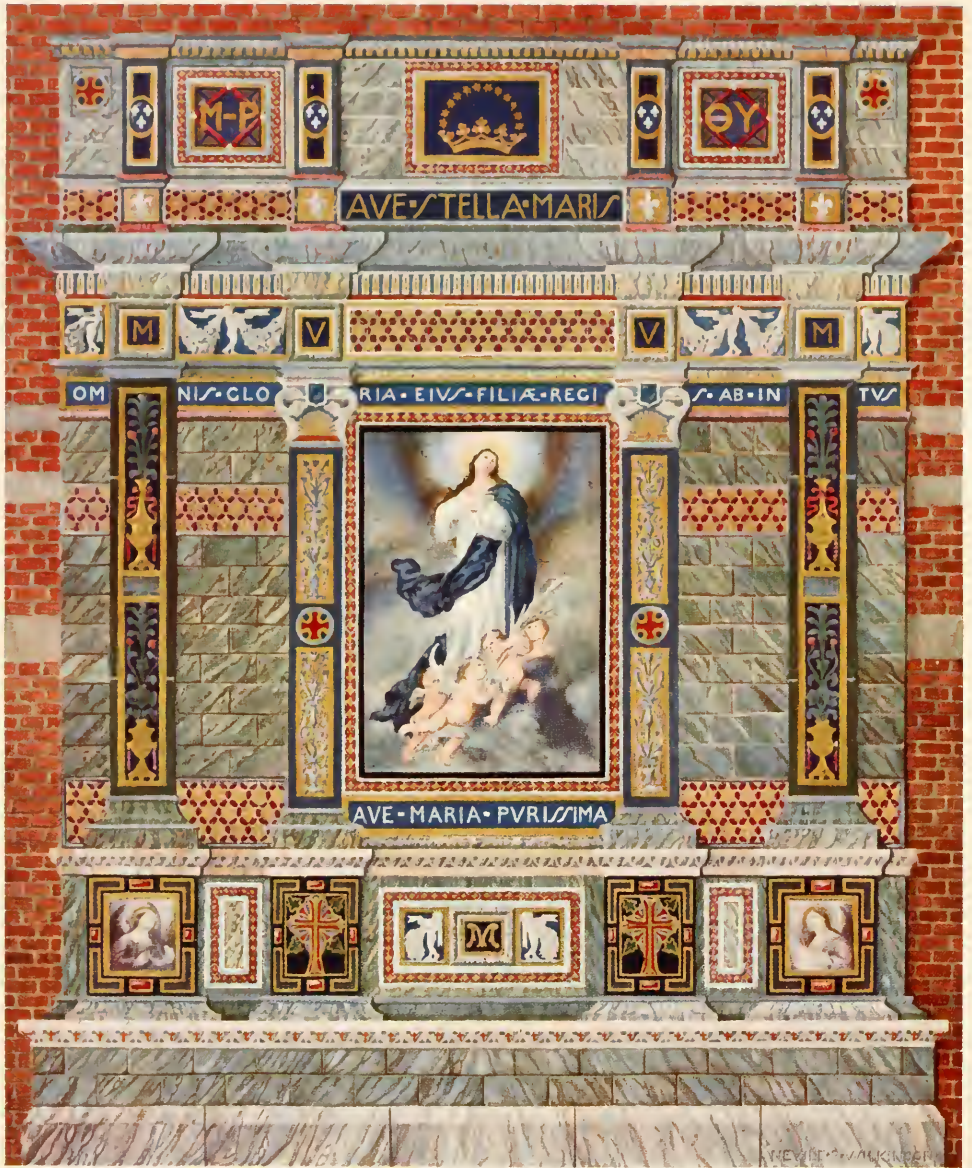
"They are the brackets which used to support the ends of the beams on which the upper floor was laid. Now let's come into the new part."

They passed their friend Bella, broom in hand, busy scattering handfuls of rose petals on the polished floor.

"You didn't think, Yvette," said the Maestro, with a smile, "when I told you the hedges out here were all roses, that the people use them to sweep the floor, just as we do tea-leaves at home?"

"We're learning a lot of new things every day," Yvette admitted. "When was this part of the Torre built, it looks much newer than the rest?"

"It was built about 1710, just after our farmer friends gave it up; when our Queen Anne was on the throne, and when so many of our best English homes were built, both in the town and in the country.



REREDOS OF THE CHAPEL

We get big windows, plenty of light and air, instead of the heavy stone walls designed more for defence than for comfort. Afterwards our house fell on evil times, and when my friend's great-grandfather bought it about the year 1830, he had to make up for years of neglect. He cleared the Fountain Court of the rubbish which had accumulated, and brought the old marble flagstones into the sunlight once more."

"And was the fountain there then?" asked Yvette. "It looks awfully old."

"No," he answered, "it wasn't put in until my friend succeeded to the Torre on his father's death. He rescued it, bronze figure and all, from a villa which was being pulled down to make room for a factory on the banks of the Arno. But it does just as well to bathe in, as you'll find when the Summer comes."

"Will it be hot enough for us to bathe in the fountain?" said Marietta. "How splendid!"

"Yes, that's why there aren't any goldfish kept in it," said the Maestro, laughing. "You'll be glad enough to tumble in and out of the cool water in a few months, I can tell you."

"Won't it be fun?" cried Yvette, "I'm longing to have a shower-bath under the fountain."

"Now come along to the Chapel," said the Maestro. "You will remember that I told you it was built at the same time as the Buondelmonte wing."

There used to be a fine old wall-painting behind the Altar by a painter called Ghirlandaio, who lived five hundred years ago: but it was getting so damaged that the authorities who look after works of art in Italy very wisely had it removed to the Accademia, where many other early Florentine pictures find a safe home. My friend, who is a painter, couldn't bear the empty wall, so he painted the picture you see here now."

"I thought it was quite old," said Marietta, "it looks exactly like marble, doesn't it? What do these funny-looking letters like capital M and P, and a funny O and a Y, stand for?"

“Those are the Greek capital letters for M and R, which is a contraction or shortening of the word for Mother. The others are TH and U which mean “of God”—MOTHER OF GOD. The long inscription in Latin with the funny S’s means ‘THE KING’S DAUGHTER IS ALL GLORIOUS WITHIN.’

The Chapel was dedicated to the Madonna, so my friend tried to keep up the tradition as far as possible.”

“There’s lovely needlework on the Altar,” whispered Yvette, “I wish I could work like that! It is nice having flowers in those big vases, it makes the Chapel look so bright.”

“May we get the fresh flowers as they are wanted?” asked Marietta, “it would be nice to save old Carlo the trouble.”

“You had better ask him,” said the Maestro, “because I fancy that he treats them as a kind of offering on behalf of his little invalid: who knows? perhaps his prayers may be answered. Perhaps he will think that you two will have more influence than he has.”

“What is really the matter with Carlotta?” asked Yvette, “she shivers so sometimes, and she is so thin and fragile.”

“She has a kind of malaria, so I’m told,” said the Maestro, “but the Doctor says there is really no reason, if she is kept as much as possible in the sunshine and open air, and given good food, why she shouldn’t get quite strong again. But what is most important is to keep her amused and interested in things. She doesn’t read well and gets dreadfully depressed sitting by herself all day.”

“We’ll see about that, won’t we, Marietta?” said Yvette confidently, “we’ll soon cheer her up! and if she isn’t quite well when we go away, we shall have to stay another year, that’s all! Let’s start by pretending she is teaching us Italian.”

“It will be jolly good practice for us anyhow,” added Marietta.

CHAPTER IX

IN QUEST OF BEAUTY

Her angel face,
As the great eye of heaven, shyned bright
And made a sunshine in the shady place.

SPENSER.

I WONDER how you would set about finding a beautiful child! Next time you go out for your walk look at all the children you meet, and see how many you would like to see painted in a picture. *Really* beautiful children, I mean; it doesn't matter in the least if their noses want blowing, or if their hands are clean or grubby! Rich or poor, it doesn't matter a bit. Ask yourself if they are like the Child Angels you see in picture-books.

If you look carefully you will probably find that their noses are too long or too short, their mouths too big or their eyes too small; something, in fact, which doesn't quite please you. Now don't imagine for one moment that I want you to think the less of a child because he, or she, does not come up to the standard set by the painter of Child Angels. Oh, dear me, no! We all know the proverb, "handsome is that handsome does," don't we?

Why! The dearest little girl I know isn't a bit picture-book looking.

Now if, after you come in from your walk, you can say that you have seen two, you will be luckier than most people!

Three keen pairs of eyes looked hard at every little Italian child who passed when our two friends and the Maestro took their daily ramble through the country lanes.

They made up all sorts of excuses for visiting the various cottages they came to.

Had the contadina seen a little fluffy dog pass that way? No! dear, dear; and is that little bambino with the curly hair her daughter?

But the child with the curly hair turned out only too often just an ordinary little country lassie.

Then on to the next cottage: would they be kind enough to say if this was the nearest way to the Torre della Pace? Oh, dear me no! the signore is coming away from it and must turn back. How provoking! And how old is the dear little cherub playing with the kitten?

But, alas, the cherub only proves another disappointment.

And so they go on, always hoping; keeping one another cheerful by jokes and stories until they have visited all the cottages on their route.

Day after day they set off in new directions with no better success.

And so the hunt went on, but no angel face smiled upon them.

"Never mind, there's plenty of time; it isn't nearly warm enough to paint out of doors," said the Maestro. "All the same, I have a sort of feeling that Cupid and his little friend are lurking quite near us. Perhaps we had better try further down the hill, even in Florence herself. I've an idea that the little Della Robbia babies on the Colonnade of the Innocenti might help us."

So off they went down among the vines by the "scorciatoio," or short-cut.

As they were just about to enter the Piazza of the Annunziata, and could actually see the little babies in their white swaddling clothes perched up between the arches, a tiny maiden, carrying a baby boy almost as big as herself, struggled up the stone steps of a little shop over the way, and disappeared in the darkness of the doorway.



BAMBINO BY LUCA DELLE ROBBIA

There was a daintiness about her movements as she hoisted her burden over the threshold, and a glint of real gold in her hair, which caught the Maestro's eye.

After stopping a moment to reconnoitre the front of the "bottega" and find out what he could buy there, he and the girls walked boldly in.

They found a little whitewashed room, almost dark after the brilliant sunshine of the streets; a wooden table piled with enamelled earthenware bowls and dishes; more crockery stacked against the wall on wooden shelves, while open crates, bursting with straw, were littered about on the tiled floor. In the corner sat a comely young woman, deftly twisting the spindle which held the thread from her distaff. A pleasant smell of freshly-roasted coffee beans filled the room.

The child they had just seen, relieved of her burden, sat on a little stool near the woman, and gazed at them out of the gloom.

"What a perfect fairy!" whispered Yvette to Marietta, while the Maestro took a lively interest in some brightly coloured bowls of red earthenware.

It did not take long to establish friendly relations with madama; and, a preliminary purchase concluded, to turn the conversation into the proper channel.

Maria, that was the elder child's name, was six. Alas, she was delicate, but good, oh yes, as good as one of the Baby Saints outside the Innocenti. What she really wanted was country food and country air: but what would you? Her father worked hard at the big railway station, so they must live close at hand: and it was but poorly paid work, so the shop was needed to keep the little household going.

Perhaps some day—who knows? The kind Saints might——

Why, certainly, the Signore should see the child and welcome!

So Maria was called and came shyly out of her dim corner.

There could be no doubt about her beauty, and it only remained for the Maestro to arrange for her to come to the Torre.

Her mother had no objection, she only asked to be allowed to come and see the little one whenever the shop was closed for a Festa, and might Giovanni Battista, her husband, come too?

Of course the Maestro consented. He would arrange to call the next day as soon as the dusk set in, and the busy time of the day was over, to take Maria, mother, and baby up to the Torre: and the carriage should bring back the two who were to return.

The little girl's eyes opened wide with wonder at the thought of riding in a real carriage like a grown-up lady.

"So far, so good," said the Maestro, as, with the help of the tram, they mounted the hill to San Domenico. "As soon as she gets accustomed to the new home, I can start making drawings of her."

The two girls were very busy all the next morning getting the room ready for the new guest; sheets were aired and every bit of the brightly-painted furniture polished until it shone.

There were two little cribs with snowy coverlets in the bedroom set apart for Cupid and his companion: but, alas, the little urchin's bed was destined to remain empty for some time longer.

"After all we have found half of what we want," said Yvette, as they put a big bowl of autumn-flowering jasmine on the chest of drawers. "And it isn't nearly warm enough to be painted in the Court-yard; certainly not in only a quiver and a rosebud!"

Maria's face of surprise delighted them all when she saw the room she was to occupy. She clung to her mother just for a moment when the time of parting came; but was soon reassured when mamma promised to bring baby up to see her on Sunday without fail.

"I call it awfully decent of those Bambini outside the Foundling Hospital to have sent us Maria," said Marietta, as she kissed the rosy cheek nestled cosily in the soft pillow. "You know, she's perfectly lovely! won't it be horrid when she has to go back."

"Don't think of anything so dreadful! Can't we persuade the Maestro to adopt her?"

"I'm afraid her parents might object," said the Maestro, who

had come quietly into the room. "I must be careful not to frighten her." And he leaned over the fair little face. But Maria looked fearlessly up at him, for children are quick to know those who love them. So he bent down and touched the little forehead with his lips and murmured, 'dormi bene, carina.'

CHAPTER X

THE GARDEN

And if indeed
In some old garden thou and I have wrought
And made fresh flowers spring up from hoarded seed,
And fragrance of old days and deeds have brought
Back to folk weary, all is not for nought.

WILLIAM MORRIS.

“NOW let’s have a ramble round the garden,” said the Maestro, one sunny morning in October, “though,” he added, “it’s more of a wilderness of flowers than a garden; for my friend liked the wild better than the tame; so we don’t find the trim flower beds and borders we are accustomed to at home.”

“There’s no grass here,” said Yvette; “how do they play croquet and games like that?”

“I’m afraid the answer to that is, they don’t!” said the Maestro.

“We’ll go down to old Carlo first, I see him talking to his little girl. His father was an old Garibaldian, and had a garden close to San Remo, where he grew roses to sell.

I often used to sit in his tiny cottage when I was a boy, and hear his tales of the ‘red-shirts,’ as they were called. He was very proud of a glaring chromo-lithograph hung on the wall, of Garibaldi lying wounded under a tree at the battle of Novara.”

“Who was Garibaldi?” asked Yvette, “I never heard of him.”

“He was Italy’s great modern hero, who drove out the Austrians and put Victor Emmanuel on the throne of united Italy.

Carlo is very proud of his father, though the old man has been dead many years now; and when he is extra pleased about something

you can hear him chanting the old war song, called Garibaldi's Hymn."

"I heard him singing the day after we came," said Yvette. "Perhaps it was that."

"This is how it goes," said the Maestro, and he sang:

La terra dei fiori, dei suoni e dei carmi
Ritorni qual era la terra dell' armi.

Va fuori d'Italia, va fuori ch'è l'ora,
Va fuori d'Italia, va fuori, O stranier!

Old Carlo's face lit up as he heard the familiar chorus.

"The signor padrone wants the young ladies to see the garden? certainly. Carlotta seems a little brighter, thank you; but the bitter tramontana (that's the cold wind) will be coming soon, and she is very fragile."

"Tell him that'll be all right," said Marietta, confidently. "Yvette and I are learning to cook beef tea, and all kinds of strengthening things. We're going to make her quite strong again!"

"Oh! isn't he a funny little dog?" she exclaimed, as a kind of woolly mat, a little threadbare in places, sidled up to them.

"Marietta!" said Yvette, reproachfully, "how *can* you? don't you remember Bimbo?"

"Oh, I didn't mean that! I didn't really!" she cried, dropping on her knees to caress the newcomer; "you're a perfectly lovely dog. What is he called? I hope I haven't hurt his feelings."

"His name is Moschino, which means 'little fly,' and you may set your mind at rest, my dear, he won't be the least offended, because he doesn't understand a word of English!" said the Maestro, laughing.

"Oh, I'm so glad!" said Marietta.

Carlo came round with them, and with the help of the Maestro, they learnt many things about a Florentine garden.

They were disappointed to find that orange and lemon trees didn't grow like ordinary trees, as they do farther south: but had

to be planted in big terra-cotta vases, so that they could be carried into a sheltered orangery for the Winter.

“ There are no strawberries or raspberries here, I’m afraid,” said the Maestro.

“ No strawberries!” exclaimed Marietta, “ what a pity.”

“ I don’t think you need complain,” said the Maestro. “ You will have cherries, peaches, plums and pears, just as we do at home. There are three kinds of figs, think of that! The figs of Saint Peter, which ripen early in June: another kind is plentiful up to September; and that small black variety you see over there is only just ripening now, in October.

In the Autumn you get persimmons, too; and we’ve forgotten all about the grapes and oranges. Doesn’t it make your mouth water?”

“ I don’t think we shall do badly, even if we don’t get strawberries, raspberries, or gooseberries,” said Marietta. “ But it sounds greedy talking about nothing but fruit: tell us something about the flowers too.”

“ As you see, the hedges round Florence are all roses, little pink monthly ones, and every sort and colour grow over the walls: you remember that crimson cascade that pleased you so, when you first arrived, growing just the other side of the Chapel. Don’t you love the little yellow and white Banksia roses?

We shall have lots of mauve Wistaria in the Spring and you can see the Japanese Jasmine on the pergola still in full bloom.

Now we’ll get Carlo to take us up the hillside and show us some of the trees. We ought to find walnuts and chestnuts; not the horse-chestnuts we are accustomed to, but those they get the nice fat nuts from you see roasting on iron trays on cold nights in London.

Then there are olives, of course, and tiny oaks no bigger than brushwood: limes and plane trees too.”

“ I love this wild path up the hill,” said Yvette, “ you get such a nice view of the top of Fiesole, and you can see the tall trees on each side of the road leading up to it.”



FIESOLE FROM THE GARDEN

“What a place for Fairies,” exclaimed Yvette, as they walked up the little pathway leading into the wild garden; “there must be lots here.”

“Alas! That is one of the tragedies of Italy. There are no Fairies.”

“No Fairies!” repeated the children with astonishment; “what do the children do without them?”

“I thought you said Italy was Fairyland?” added Marietta.

“I said it was like Fairyland,” corrected the Maestro. “So it is: and Titania likes her Palace to remind her of the happy days she spent there.”

“Then they did live here once,” said Yvette.

“They lived here once, as you say,” said the Maestro, sadly; “but they had to go.”

“Do tell us all about it!”

“First of all then: listen!” and he held up his finger; “do you hear the birds singing?”

The children stood still for a moment; then they heard a faint “peep, peep,” from the bushes on the hill. Just the tiny pipe of one frightened little wanderer, who had flown down from the hills and found himself alone.

“Yes! There’s one,” they cried.

“Think what you would hear in an English or an Irish garden,” he said, “at daylight the ‘Dawn Chorus,’ thrushes, starlings, black-birds, robins, sparrows, finches of all kinds, fly catchers, reed warblers and all their tribe, scores of tiny throats singing against each other in the joy of the morning. All day long they would be calling each other from tree and bush: and in the long twilight you would hear the blackbird calling to his mate from every thicket. That’s the music of an English garden.

Now, children, can you hear the birds singing?”

“No, we can’t,” they answered, sadly.

“Years ago,” he went on, “they sang as bravely here as in any

garden at home; and then the Fairies lived here. For Fairies can only be happy where there are birds to sing to them."

"But why aren't there any little birds here now?" asked Marietta.

"They have nearly all been shot or trapped," said the Maestro, gravely.

"How dreadful!" said the children.

"Was it because they eat up the fruit and things," asked Marietta.

"Partly, no doubt, because some of them fed on grain and berries, but they were killed chiefly to eat."

"What! dear little song-birds," cried Yvette, incredulously, "tiny little things like that: they wouldn't make a mouthful."

"I've seen the countryfolk shooting at every songster that stirred; even dear little tomtits," said the Maestro, mournfully:

"You can imagine King Oberon couldn't stand this. He issued a Proclamation saying that if the Italians didn't stop shooting song-birds, he and his Court would leave the country. Well, they wouldn't leave off; so he and Titania shut up their homes and left Italy."

"How dreadfully sad," said the children, "but they'll come back again when they leave off killing them," added Marietta, hopefully.

"I can't help feeling there are a few Fairies left in Italy"; said Yvette, "you should see Maria smiling when she's asleep."

"You must remember that she only left Heaven a few years ago, so she still has lots of little friends up there, who come down on the moon-beams to play with her. That's why she smiles in her sleep."

"Nanny says it's something quite different," said Marietta.

"Nanny would!" said the Maestro, indignantly.

CHAPTER XI

BEPPINO

She saw his golden head alight with curls.

E. B. BROWNING.

BEPPINO was howling, his cheeks were all puckered up, like those funny little india-rubber faces we used to buy at the Soho Bazaar. His dimpled fists were squeezed into his eyes.

For little urchins of four years old, whose sole garment consists of a tiny vest, are but poorly protected against an attack by big sister!

Beppino had been indulging in the time-honoured pastime of making mud-pies, and thereby generally messing himself up, instead of sitting, good and tidy, on a wooden stool, and nursing a very rudimentary rag doll, as he had been directed by superior authority.

“What a little duck,” said Yvette, as our party came round the corner; “poor little mite, I’m afraid he must have hurt himself!”

“I should not be at all surprised to find that someone else had been doing the hurting,” said the Maestro, smiling.

Beppino, hearing strange voices, looked up. Two big girls, he thought with horror, each with a pair of hands: and he gave himself up for lost, plunged his fists deeper into his eyes, and gave vent to a piercing yell, which put his previous efforts completely in the shade.

The tender-hearted girls ran towards him, and at the same time a big untidy girl came out of the cottage close by. She said something sharply to the little vocalist, and then, catching sight of the newcomers, changed her tone, and feeling, no doubt, that the situation required some explanation, addressed the Maestro in voluble Italian.

“I’m certain she isn’t kind to him,” cried Marietta, “and he *is*

such a darling! Look what big blue eyes he has. Oh, what is that girl saying? I do wish she would stop talking!"

"One at a time, please!" said the Maestro. "As far as I can gather she tells me that your little angel is really an imp of the Evil One: that he messes himself up to the eyes the moment he is left to himself: that her father is away at work, and her mother gone to the Festa to sell her wares, and she is left to tidy up and cook the supper: that mamma will scold her if Beppino is muddy when she comes back.

Anyhow we have learnt his name, and that is something."

The cherub, seeing that the two girls had apparently no sinister designs on his plump little person, became reassured: and the imp of the Evil One developed into the most perfect type of Italian Child Angel it is possible to conceive.

A halo of golden curls framed a pair of cheeks tinted with the most delicate peach bloom: each cheek crowned with a great star of liquid blue, whose edges were softened by curved lashes.

His pretty pouting mouth, witless of speech,
Lay halfway open like a rose-lipp'd shell;
And his young cheek was softer than a peach,
Whereon his tears, for roundness, could not dwell
But quickly roll'd themselves to pearls, and fell.*

His limbs were sturdy and well rounded, although at the moment begrimed with happy mud. In short, he was just such a model as Verrocchio would have chosen for the child who stands for ever in the Cortile of the Palazzo Vecchio.

"I wonder if his mother would let him come to the Torre and sit," said the Maestro: "he's exactly the type we want. Absolutely the little Mischief-maker to the life:

Naked he goeth, but with sprightly wings
Red, iridescent are his shoulders fledged.
A bow his weapon, which he deftly strings,
And little arrows barb'd and keenly edged.

* Thomas Hood.

Let me see, wasn't it Robert Bridges who wrote that?"

Then he asked the girl when her mother was expected home again.

That would depend on whether she had a lucky day, and in any case she would be in a bad temper, and would surely scold one or other of the children.

So they agreed that it would be better to defer any interview with the contadina until she had slept off the effects of the Festa.

"Let's call him Beppo, I think it's nicer than Beppino, don't you, Marietta?" said Yvette.

"I think he is perfectly sweet, whatever you call him," was her somewhat inconsequent reply; and they had some difficulty in parting the two new friends, for Cupid had one of her ribbons clasped in two chubby fists, and was shouting with delight.

The next day the Maestro walked down and interviewed the Imp's mother. He found her more pleasant than the daughter had led him to expect, and it wasn't long before he had made a satisfactory bargain.

She would be very glad to have Beppino well cared for; her work took her away from home most of the day, and she was afraid Katerina had too much to do to look after him properly. Yes, Beppino should be brought to the signore's Villa that very evening: she would wash him herself and put on his best frock.

The innocent subject of the bargain, Beppino himself, did not take any interest in the conversation, although it so nearly affected his future: for the Maestro had slipped a bit of "sucre d'orge" into his fat little hand as a peace-offering, and he sat, contentedly sucking it, on the tiled floor, gazing with great blue eyes at the stranger whose pockets contained such wonders.

Beppino's mother was to bring him up to the Torre della Pace herself, and she undertook to stay until he was asleep: for he was sure to be strange at first, though surrounded by loving faces, and lapped in luxuries of which his infant mind had not even dreamt. Also the Maestro did not want a repetition of yesterday's concert!

You can imagine how excited the three children were, when they heard that Cupid was to come that very evening to claim his throne.

“ I’m afraid there will be extra work for you two big ones and Bella,” said the Maestro apologetically: “ His Highness will want a lot of attention from his courtiers, and with Maria on your hands as well you will have to be up bright and early.”

“ Oh, we shall just love minding Beppo,” said Marietta, “ and Maria is such a big girl now that she is very little trouble: she loves her morning bath.”

The Maestro smiled. Maria had at first deeply resented the efforts of Bella and her little assistants to induce her to adopt the same standard of cleanliness as the British child. To her the morning tub was an invention of the Devil, and, good little Catholic that she was, she refused to countenance his handiwork.

“ I wonder what kind of flowers Beppo would like in his bedroom,” said thoughtful Yvette.

“ The brightest we can find,” said Marietta confidently, “ little children always love bright colours.” And they slipped off into the garden to beg a nosegay from old Carlo, returning laden with an armful of scarlet tritomas, which we used to call red hot pokers; graceful crimson montbrezias, and zinias, red, purple, and blue.

Beppino, or Beppo, as we shall call him in future, made his triumphal entry just at tea time, and was conducted in state to the Camera dei Bambini. The new “ donna di cucina ” had picked him out an apple-green faience bowl, one of the few which had survived her predecessor.

He was enthroned on a tall baby-chair, which had been discovered, thickly coated with dust and cobwebs, in the loft over Bella’s room.

It might have once been used by a son of the house of Buondelmonte at the beginning of the seventeenth century, so worn and smooth were the carved back and arms.

The ceaseless chatter of the three girls, and the good things heaped upon his plate, kept the little new-comer from noticing the

strangeness of his surroundings. So all went well until bed-time. Whether Beppo missed the scoldings he was used to, or whether he suddenly realized that he was among strangers, the little nurses could not tell. But his dimpled fists went once more into his eyes, and, after inflating his sturdy chest to its full extent, he gave vent to a yell which was a sufficient proof of the soundness of his lungs.

“Run! Marietta, run quickly and fetch his mother!” cried Yvette. So the contadina, who had been enjoying a comfortable gossip in Margherita's kitchen, was hurried upstairs, and Beppo, chanting like an animated bag-pipe, was bundled into her maternal arms, the Court, meanwhile, retiring to their own room. Through the half-open door they heard the sobs growing fainter, and when they ventured back again, Beppo lay placidly in his little white cot; while his mother crooned a lullaby like this:

Ninna-nanna, ninna-nanna,
Giace e dorme l'agnellina,
Ninna-nanna, ninna-nanna,
Monna luna s'incammina.
Ninna-nanna, ninna-nanna,
Tace e dorme l'uccellino.

Ninna-nanna, ninna-nanna,
Dormi, dormi, o figliolino,
Ninna-nanna, ninna-nanna.*

* Christina Rossetti.

CHAPTER XII

FLORENCE

Build to-day then, strong and sure,
With a firm and ample base:
And ascending and secure
Shall to-morrow find its place.
LONGFELLOW.

THIS is a Lesson Chapter, so lazy readers had better skip it! But I warn them they may miss something if they do.

The Maestro didn't mean Marietta and Yvette to spend all their time playing in the "Podere" with Carlotta and the two little ones, while the wonders of Florence lay at their feet unexplored. To give them their due, the children were anxious to learn about the great buildings they could see below; tinted like mother-of-pearl in the early morning, and rosy in the glow of the sunset.

"Now, children, we'll have a long day in Florence, and do some work," he announced at breakfast: "I'll take you to lunch at a Restaurant, and we'll have a look at the great David, and some other things."

So down the hill they went in the grinding and screeching tram, and soon arrived at the great Cathedral, called Santa Maria del Fiori: "Just where the two figures of Bramante and Brunelleschi sit for ever admiring their handiwork," said the Maestro.

"Aeroplanes!" said Yvette, looking up.

"I'm sorry, my dears; I mean that there are two big bronze statues of the man who designed the Cathedral, and the man who built the dome above it, so placed that they seem to be admiring the buildings they planned so long ago.



THE DAVID OF MICHELANGELO

Now, let's walk down the Via del Proconsolo, where old Bigazzi lives, from whom my friend bought so many of the beautiful things we have at the Torre."

I'm not going to give you a list of all the buildings they passed, because you can borrow your mother's old Baedeker and look them up for yourselves.

"That's what you're going to learn to-day," said the Maestro, pointing to a huge white marble figure of a youth, which stood before a kind of castle in a big square. "That's Michelangelo's David."

"Why are you so awfully fond of big marble figures?" asked Marietta.

"My dear child, I'm shocked! you forget you're in school now, and you ought to be silent and attentive; fancy interrupting like that! But in case you think I'm reproving you in order to avoid answering an awkward question, I'll tell you.

Look at the next building we pass, and you'll see the biggest stones nearest the ground, otherwise the building would be top-heavy and liable to fall.

I'm trying to build up in your minds the foundations for a love of beautiful things: and I choose the grandest and simplest ideas for my foundation stones, so that you may build safely on them when you grow up.

Now don't say 'aeroplanes,' because any child of your age ought to be able to follow me as far as that!

What did you learn at the Louvre, Yvette?"

"Let me think: that big white lady, the Beauty of Repose, that was it."

"And after that, Marietta?"

"The Beauty of Action," she answered promptly, "with no head."

"Right! This David shows the beauty of the two combined, and we'll call it the Beauty of Action in Repose. As it happens, he has all his limbs."

“ I suppose you call it that because, although he’s standing still, he’s got his sling ready, and looks as if he saw Goliath coming.”

“ Yes, that’s exactly what I want you to see in it,” said the Maestro.

The luncheon was a merry one. The Maestro told them about the famous lantern which they could see on the corner of the Palazzo Strozzi opposite: how its maker, old Caparra the Blacksmith, when Lorenzo the Magnificent asked him make some special piece of iron-work he wanted for his palace in a hurry, told him he must wait his turn like the rest, and went on with his work. To Lorenzo’s credit, he said, the story tells that instead of being angry he praised the old man for his independence. They sat some time afterwards looking at the constant stream of tourists which flows up and down the Via Tornabuoni all the Winter.

“ We are lucky,” said Yvette, “ there are hardly any little girls of our age, and the big ones have all got such clever-looking people, with guide books, with them.”

The Maestro’s eyebrows went up.

“ Oh dear, I don’t mean it quite like that,” she hastened to explain, “ I mean *those* clever-looking people don’t look nice to be with.”

“ Thank you!” said the Maestro.

“ Now, let’s come as far as the Ponte Vecchio and have a look at the Arno.”

The road over the old bridge in the centre of Florence runs between a double row of shops, but there is an open space just in the middle from which you can see up and down the river.

The children were quite excited when a four-oared racing skiff, practising for the coming regatta, dashed through the arch beneath them.

“ May we buy something for Maria and Beppo?” asked Marietta; “ something quite cheap; we’ve still got a little of the money you gave us.”



THE PONTE VECCHIO

“ Yes, if you promise to do your bargaining in Italian,” said the Maestro, but, unfortunately, the shopman insisted on answering them in excellent English.

With the help of the Maestro they were able to buy a string of coral beads for Maria, and a little filigree brooch in silver, in the form of a Maltese cross, for Carlotta.

“ I don't know what to get for Beppo,” sighed Yvette, “ Italian children don't like dolls; he wouldn't play with the one he had when we found him, and jewellery looks so silly on a boy.”

“ There's a Neapolitan sash over there, in all sorts of bright colours, just about his size,” suggested the Maestro, “ I should have liked it at his age.”

“ The very thing!” cried the children; and for many weeks afterwards Cupid might be seen in the garden, looking like a tiny brigand, with a rainbow tied round his plump little waist.

I wish I could describe to you all the beautiful things the two girls saw in the Bargello that afternoon. But that would take volumes; and if I only name them, it will be about as interesting as a Washing List: Six pairs of Della Robbia Plaques, one Urbino Tazza, eight pieces of assorted Tapestry, and so on. I must mention one: an illuminated Missal which the Maestro was certain he had painted during a previous incarnation, when he was a monk at Fiesole.

“ Aeroplanes!” says a voice beside me.

CHAPTER XIII

BEPPPO'S ADVENTURE

Contented, he forgets to fly away
But hush . . . remind not Eros of his Wings.

WILLIAM WATSON.

UNDER Nanny's superintendence and with Bella's help, the two girls soon became efficient nursery maids, and Beppo and Maria flourished under their care.

There were no idle moments at the Torre.

As soon as the warm spring weather came, Yvette and Marietta were up at six o'clock; bunches of fresh flowers for the house and the Chapel were picked and arranged before seven.

After that was done they ran to the Camera dei Bambini, as they called the night-nursery. Then, the two little ones seated at breakfast under Nanny's watchful eye, off they went to help Bella lay the breakfast downstairs, and give old Margherita the benefit of their advice as to how it should be cooked.

"You'll soon qualify for your 'child-nurse,' 'domestic-service,' and 'cooking' badges," the Maestro used to say, "you're such gallant workers that I must really ask Queen Titania to make you Star Maidens of the Fairy Kiss: you carry out the motto of the Order so thoroughly."

You mustn't imagine that the girls had no trouble at all with Beppo and Maria. It would be silly to pretend that a baby of four and a maiden just seven years old are always good and obedient! Master Cupid often wanted to have his own way, and howled most indignantly when he didn't get it.

One morning they all had a great fright.

Bella was sitting on the Terrace in the shade, for the warm weather had come, while the two little ones were playing close by. The air was still and the music of the bees made her drowsy; so little by little her head nodded.

Beppo must have crept away without Maria noticing him, for when Bella woke up with a start, the little girl couldn't tell her which way the urchin had gone.

Then there was a hue and cry, I can tell you. For Beppo seemed to have disappeared off the face of the earth.

Nanny was hastily summoned from the Children's Room, where she was busy ironing. Carlo was sent off one way and Bella the other. All the tanks were looked into.

The news was brought to Yvette and Marietta as they sat with Carlotta in the shelter they had built for her, and they dashed off to help. The Maestro was watching one of his etched copperplates as it lay in the bath of emerald green acid, when he heard the clatter of an empty scuttle falling on the marble flags of the Court outside. He looked up just in time to see Margherita, her hands raised above her head in horror, disappearing into the Kitchen.

"What can be the matter?" he exclaimed, running to the door. Then he stopped suddenly, for he saw a strange little black ball, surrounded by a yellow mop, moving over the step of the old doorway which led into the wood shed: next two grubby little paws came over the edge of the step, followed by an exceedingly grimy vest. At this moment Yvette dashed in from the Studio.

"Beppo's lost!" she cried, "come and help find him!"

"I rather think Beppo's found," said the Maestro grimly, pointing to the strange little animal, which, grimed from head to foot with soot and coal-dust, was crawling across the Fountain Court to the scuttle which Margherita had dropped in her flight. They went across to the little imp, who was banging the scuttle joyfully on the marble, and who sat up and screamed with delight as they came up, crying triumphantly in Italian, "Beppo's painted himself!"

Then they saw Margherita's face peep round from the Kitchen, relieved to find that the little black devil, whose bright eyes had frightened her so in the dim wood-shed, was real flesh and blood. Beppo had been having a royal time with the sack of soot, put carefully away for use in the garden: and he was most indignant when a scared and angry Bella caught him up, and holding him at arm's length, carried him off to the Bathroom.

Yvette ran off to tell the good news to the other searchers, and the Maestro, exclaiming, "I hope my plate isn't overbitten," darted back into the Printing Room.

"It's lucky he didn't have his new sash on!" said Marietta, when she heard the story.

CHAPTER XIV

THE UFFIZI

There be more things to greet the heart and eyes
In Arno's dome of Art's most princely Shrine,
Where Sculpture with her rainbow Sister vies,
There be more marvels yet——

BYRON.

A FEW days after their first visit to Florence the Maestro made an announcement which cast a temporary shadow over the girls' bright faces.

"I've decided," he said solemnly, as they sat at breakfast, "that the time has come when we must begin regular lessons at the Torre."

"O-O-Oh," groaned both of his hearers.

"So I've consulted an old friend of mine," he continued, turning a deaf ear to their protests, "and by her advice I am asking a charming Italian lady, Miss Fermi, to come here for two hours on three days a week."

The faces brightened a little.

"That isn't very much, anyhow," said Yvette, "we'll still have a little playtime left."

"I hope she's really charming," said Marietta, "grown-ups have such funny ideas about 'charming!'"

"It depends very much on the pupils whether teachers are nice or not, don't forget that," said the Maestro: "charming pupils make charming teachers."

"And I suppose it's true the other way round," said Yvette.

"There may be some truth in that, too," admitted the Maestro: "but to continue, Miss Fermi will come at two o'clock on Mondays,

Wednesdays, and Fridays, beginning next week. And now I've something pleasanter to announce.

To-day I'm going to show you one of the great Picture Galleries. I'll expect you at ten sharp, and we'll lunch in Florence."

This time they went down the hill by tram, for there is nothing so tiring as looking at pictures in a public gallery: it's quite another thing when they are decorating the walls of your own house; then it's restful.

The Gallery they were to visit lies just beyond the great building on the steps of which the David mounts guard. It occupies the upper story of a building built round a paved courtyard. The end overlooks the river Arno, close to the Ponte Vecchio, where the girls bought Beppo's sash.

"It's called the Uffizi," explained the Maestro, "because many of the State Departments found accommodation under its roof; some are here still."

"That doesn't tell us why it's called You-fitsy, does it?" said Marietta.

"I'm sorry, I ought to have told you that Uffizi is the Italian for Offices," said the Maestro. "You may remember that I told you of a Florentine family called Medici, whose coat of arms appears very often in Titania's Palace. This Gallery contains part of their collection of pictures, with additions, of course."

"They must be awfully rich to have such a lot," said Marietta, "but why don't they keep them at home and look at them comfortably?"

"There are none of the family left now," explained the Maestro, "so there isn't a home to put them in."

The Medici were the great bankers in Florence hundreds of years ago. They became so powerful that they were made Grand Dukes.

The only daughter of the last Medici married an Austrian: but they had no children, and when she died she left the whole of the collections she had inherited to her dear City of Florence.

And she didn't leave only the pictures and statues and big things: she gave all the wonderful gems of tiny-craft made by the greatest artists and craftsmen in gold, silver, and precious stones: things like the mirror you saw in the Louvre."

"There's a terribly long climb up to the top floor," he continued, as soon as their umbrellas had been given up, "so we'll go up in the lift."

"These pictures look all dry and peeling off in flakes, don't they," said Yvette, as they walked down the well-lighted gallery where the pictures called Primitives are hung. They are the old frescoes or wall paintings which were taken from Churches where they were getting destroyed by damp and candle smoke and other things.

"I suppose that's why they took down the one that used to be in the Chapel at the Torre," said Marietta. "Is it here?"

"No, that one is now in another gallery called the Accademia: we'll go and pay it a visit some day," said the Maestro: "these look dusty to us because they were not painted with oil paints, but in what we call tempera, so they don't look so rich in colour as those we're used to. But you'll get awfully fond of them when you grow older: because you'll see how hard the painter tried to make Angels look like what he thought Angels should look like, and not merely like pretty people he saw in the streets; and the same with the Saints. Afterwards they thought more of making a pretty picture than why they were Saints and Angels.

And you must try to remember that in the early days of the Church the clergymen laid down very strict rules about painting; for instance, all the Madonnas had to be painted in the same position, dressed in the same pattern clothes. That's why you would call most of them in this Gallery stiff and wooden looking."

"That certainly does describe them," agreed Yvette. "Aren't there any rules like that now?"

"Very few," said the Maestro, "the painters wanted to paint as

they liked; so the clergymen very wisely let them do very much as they pleased, so long as they painted the sort of pictures that would look nice in the churches.

We'll come along into this room on the left and look at one of the later paintings."

"They must have had any amount of gold in those days," said Marietta, "the circles round the heads of the Saints and Angels, I don't know what they're called, and the embroidery on their clothes are all done in what looks like real gold."

"The circles are called 'aureoles' and you're quite right, they are made of real gold, or they wouldn't shine like that after six hundred years or so. They didn't have paper money in those days," said the Maestro, "the Florentine florin was known and valued all over the world, because its gold was so pure; until the Venetians made one a little heavier and just as pure which cut it out."

"I call that mean of them, don't you, Marietta?" said Yvette. "I'm not sure that I like the Venice people."

"Wait until you've seen the city they built, just on a wet bit of sand-bank," said the Maestro, smiling. "Now come and look at the big round picture over there. I want you to take the pictures here in very small mouthfuls: if you try to see a lot at once they'll give your eyes and mind indigestion, just as if you were to eat too many dishes at dinner.

This picture is by a painter called Botticelli, though his real name was Filipepi."

"What a funny name," said Marietta, "it sounds like a little bird chirping!"

"We'll call him Sandro then, for that was the short for Alessandro, his Christian name. Let's sit here on the seat in front, and have a quiet look before we talk about it."

So they sat still for a few minutes.

"Well, what do you think of Sandro's picture," asked the Maestro, breaking the silence.



BOTTICELLI'S MAGNIFICAT

“ Some of the angels look dreadfully delicate,” said Yvette, “ they remind me a little of Carlotta.”

“ I expect those are the ones who went to Heaven when they were little,” said Marietta, “ you see, if they'd been quite strong, they'd have grown up.”

“ I wish people would paint like that now,” sighed Yvette. “ I like it ever so much: it has such lovely colours. We shouldn't have seen what a great deal there is in it, if we had walked past it, as one generally does, instead of sitting quite quiet and just looking.”

“ That's the mistake everybody makes in a Picture Gallery,” said the Maestro, “ we walk past instead of looking. It's not always our fault, because we are sometimes obliged to hurry, and sometimes there aren't any seats.

If you learn to look and think instead of walking past, you will profit by your first visit to the Uffizi.”

CHAPTER XV

CUPID'S COURT

NIHIL SINE LABORE

Ne altrimenti in piu rustiche carte,
Anz' una pronta man prenda'l pennello,
Fra' dotti ingegni il piu accorto e bello
Prova e rivede, e sue storia comparte.
MICHEL-ANGELO.

Thus, too, before the painter dares to ply
Paint-brush on canvas, he is wont to write
Sketches on scraps of paper, and invite
Wise minds to judge his figured history.
J. A. SYMONDS.

IT was high Summer, and the garden was a blaze of colour. Early to rise and late to bed was the rule at the Torre. Which would have just suited you, wouldn't it?

You must remember that in the heat and sunshine of an Italian Summer, children, and grown-ups too, must keep in the shade in the middle of the day: it's called taking a Siesta.

At six in the morning the children were splashing in their bath, and they were out in the garden before seven.

Luncheon was at eleven, and at noon the little ones were lying, cool and comfortable, on their beds in a darkened room, with only the drowsy cooing of Bella's pigeons to disturb them. Work on the big picture took an hour or two of the morning. I know you'll want to hear about Cupid's Court, and the way it was painted, because so much depended on it.

If it wasn't a success, and nobody wanted to buy it, there would

be no more trips abroad for Yvette and Marietta! The painter was not born with a silver spoon in his mouth, like a little lady you will hear of later on.

Now for the picture. The Maestro was very old-fashioned, so, first of all, he made a careful sketch from the whole group as they are described in Chapter VIII.

It was a job to get them arranged, I can tell you!

As soon as Beppo was properly in position, down would come a big bumble bee to see what it was all about, and our Cupid would make a wild dash for safety: and you can't blame him, can you? Suppose you only wore the band of a little quiver over your shoulder!

The Maestro, sitting under the wall of the Studio just inside the courtyard, told endless stories in simple Italian: among them the story of 'Pinocchio,' the Marionette; you all know that.

He invented fairy Godmothers for Maria and Beppo: very large ladies they were, dressed in satin, and wearing costly jewels: and the little ones stood gazing at him in wonder, half expecting them to appear.

He told them that, when the Printing Room was a stable, the animals in it, horses, donkeys, and the rest, used to talk to each other.

"But you couldn't understand them," said Marietta, incredulously.

"I'm talking of what happened two hundred years ago," he explained, "and Fairies were still here then, you know."

So, little by little, the first sketch was made.

After this the work was easier, for he only wanted one little sitter at a time. The others played round the fountain, like little frogs, splashing in and out of the marble basin as they pleased. Sometimes they played bowls with golden oranges along the marble pavement, until it was time to take refuge from the midday sun.

Then, for many days, the Maestro worked on the background, and painted the little orange tree in the corner above Marietta; while

the children played in the garden with Carlotta and Moschino. Yvette and Marietta used to criticise the picture freely.

“ You have given Beppo beautiful red lips,” said Marietta one day.

“ I only wish I could do them justice!” said the Maestro with a sigh, “ when I see them I think of the lines :

So look the Mornings when the Sun
Paints them with fresh Vermilion
So Cherries blush, and Kathern Peares,
And Apricocks, in youthful Yeares ;
So Corrolls look more lovely red,
And Rubies lately polished.

That’s by Herrick ; you’ll read him when you grow up.”

“ It’s lucky,” said Marietta, “ that the sunshine only stays in the right place for painting the picture about an hour each morning. So there’s plenty of play-time for us. You were quite right about the fountain. We love splashing about in it this hot weather : it’s just like a big bath, and the marble is so deliciously cool to lie on.”

“ You have a very easy time,” said the Maestro, “ only a couple of hours real lessons from Miss Fermi three afternoons a week : I’m afraid you’ll be spoilt.”

“ We’ve learnt lots and lots of Italian all by ourselves,” said Yvette indignantly. “ We can talk quite quickly to Carlotta : and I know the names of all the things in the kitchen, and heaps of the trees and flowers!”

“ I’m quite certain it can’t be wrong to be happy,” added Marietta, “ and we do help you with the picture, too! Come along, Yvette, it’s time to look after Carlotta.”

I think Marietta was right, don’t you? Because if you are not doing good you can’t be really happy.

In the evenings, when Maria and Beppo were safely in bed, the two girls and the Maestro would sit on the terrace, while the moon looked down from above them over the sleeping valley of the Arno ; when the frogs had taken up the chorus of the cicales, which had

died down drowsily at sunset, and glow-worm sparks lit up the shadows.

Then he would tell them stories of Florence in the olden days. They were never tired of hearing the story of his favourite hero of the Medici family, Giovanni delle Bande Nere, John of the Black Bands.

How he had ridden under the walls of his home, and called to his wife at the window above to throw him down his infant son: how he caught the fearless little Cosimo in his steel-clad arms and kissed him. The Cosimo who was to become the first Grand Duke of Florence.

He told them how Giovanni, true soldier that he was, had spent all that he had in training and caring for his picked troops in time of peace, so that they might be ready in time of war.

Some day you will go and see his rugged and determined face with its piercing eyes in the Bargello, modelled by a great Florentine sculptor.

So they would sit and listen in the quiet moonlight, until the old bell of San Domenico tolled the signal for bed.

CHAPTER XVI

BREKEKEKEX! KOAX! KOAX!

From out
The green heart of the waters round about,
Welled as a bubbling fountain silverly
The overflowing song.

WILLIAM WATSON.

IN the corner of the garden below the old tower was built a big stone water-tank, close up against the bank which overhung the Podere on the North-western side. It was fed by a spring which trickled down over glistening stones shaded by maidenhair and hart's-tongue ferns.

Clumps of the giant bulrush hedged in the water, which overflowed to form a merry little streamlet dancing past old Carlo's cottage.

Strayed branches from the rose hedge above overhung the still water, and were mirrored in the quiet surface.

This tank was tenanted by a small colony of frogs, who loved to idle their time away hidden in the cool moss: their emerald tint making it almost impossible to find them among the surrounding green.

On fine still nights in the Summer their hoarse little croaks could be heard above that great chorus, to which each tiny throat, be it of cricket or frog, contributes its quota: and which sounds through the Southern night like "the sound of many waters."

It was an unending source of delight to the two girls to pry among the polished leaves of fern and overhanging trees, hoping to find the dainty little fellow crouched so close that he seemed almost a part of the leaf. Sometimes with his bright eyes shining and wakeful, like

two tiny beads, hoping that some unwary fly would light within reach of his darting tongue. Sometimes dreaming away the sunny hours, heedless of the approach of little fingers.

These frogs are very seldom seen swimming in the tank during the daytime, and it was one of the children's amusements to take them tenderly from their hiding place, and, by a little skilful manœuvring, arrange a mimic swimming race across the water.

"What beauties they are!" said Yvette, looking down with admiration at the supple little creature gazing up at her out of her warm little palm; "its skin is just like the softest emerald silk; poor little thing, look how it is panting; be quick with yours, Marietta, and let's put them in for a swim!"

"I do wish there were more of them," sighed Marietta, "they are *so* difficult to find. There are plenty of tadpoles: one can see dozens of the little black things, with their blobby heads poking into the weed and their tiny tails waving."

"I suppose they will be frogs some day," said Yvette.

"Oh, that will take a dreadfully long time," said Marietta. "Don't you think we might find some more nice big bright-coloured ones in the tanks up the hill, and bring them down here. I believe we could easily catch them in a butterfly-net sort of thing. Let's make one! I'm sure the Maestro would be ever so pleased: he was saying only yesterday what beautiful little creatures they are. It would be a lovely surprise for him!"

So the two little plotters laid their plans. With Bella's help they made a muslin net: and the next time that business called the Maestro into Florence alone, they set off up the hill with one of Carlo's watering-pots to make their captures.

The hunt was successful beyond their wildest expectations, and in a couple of hours they came, like Jack and Jill, triumphantly down the hill, but fortunately with no mishap, bearing between them the watering-pot alive with at least a score of the finest specimens of the frog tribe to be found round Fiesole.

These they carefully emptied into the tank, causing a most unwonted disturbance among the usually placid tadpoles and water-beetles.

For some time the two girls remained gazing with admiration at the result of their "caccia," pointing out the finest specimens to each other: then, hungry with their exertions, ran off in quest of Tea, with the pleasant feeling which comes from a good action worthily performed.

Those who know the habits of the Southern frog will not be surprised to hear that as soon as the moon sailed in quiet grandeur over the Chapel gable, the recent importations set up a lament, a kind of "Fiesole no More," with the full power of their lungs: while the former inhabitants, indignant at the invasion of their sacred pool, chanted a shrill War Song which woke the echoes by its vehemence!

The Maestro, turning restlessly in his bed, for his open window, as you will remember, overlooked the terrace, thought that there must be a great rain storm imminent to cause such an unusually penetrating chorus from the frogs.

As the noise continued unabated, he made up his mind to tell Carlo that he must catch some of the offenders and deport them. It was too much of a good thing: one really couldn't sleep for the noise. He never remembered them so vocal before; there must surely be a deluge coming!

Meanwhile Yvette and Marietta, soundly asleep on the other side of the house, were supremely unconscious of the effect of their good hunting.

The next morning a rather jaded Maestro came into the Breakfast Room. The sun was blazing across the terrace outside.

"Well," he said, wearily, "I could have wagered there would be a rain storm to-day: I never remember hearing such a noise as the frogs were making last night. Did they disturb you, children?"

Marietta and Yvette looked blankly at each other: a dreadful suspicion began to come into their minds.

“ Did they croak *very* loud,” they asked, “ we didn’t hear them.”

“ You sleep on the other side of the house, you see,” said the Maestro: “ my window opens on the garden and the noise from that tank in the corner was simply deafening. I might as well have been sleeping over the Lion house at the Zoo!”

“ Oh! I’m *so* sorry,” cried Yvette, running to him and putting her arms round his neck; “ it was all our fault!”

“ My dear! Have you gone dotty? How on earth could you and Marietta make the frogs croak, while you were sleeping peacefully in your little beds?”

“ But it was really!” and Yvette’s voice began to quaver, “ and we *did* think you would be so pleased! Marietta, you tell him, I can’t.” And the tender-hearted little girl looked appealingly at her companion.

“ It was just like this,” began Marietta bravely, “ we thought, as you liked the frogs in the tank so much, we would get you some more nice big ones as a surprise.”

The Maestro’s eyes opened wider and wider.

“ So we went out and caught at least twenty of the biggest we could find. Oh! they were such lovely ones! And we carried them all the way down the hill in a watering-pot—and then we—.”

“ Put them all in the tank,” continued Yvette mournfully, “ and it was to have been such a lovely surprise; and instead they kept you awake all night. Oh! I *am* sorry,” and the tear-drops quivered on her eyelids.

The Maestro’s face broke into a broad smile as the full humour of the situation dawned upon him.

“ My dear children, what a perfectly lovely idea! So the Brekekekex! Koax! Koax! chorus, as the Greek playwright calls it, which made night hideous, was caused by a change of domicile, not by a change in the weather. But you forgot one very important fact: the captives of your net and watering-pot were the fathers and mothers of large families. It was only to be expected that they should

raise their voices and weep at the thought of the dear little tadpoles left unprotected.

“ I am grateful for your kindly intention, very grateful indeed ; but I think I must ask you to reverse the process. We cannot, of course, return each parent to a sorrowing family : but we will muster all our forces, horse, foot, and artillery, and we won't rest until at least twenty of the disturbers of last night's peace are back again on the hillside once more.

At ten o'clock sharp then, children, for the hunt ; and if fortune favours us we may save the poor Maestro's sleep to-night.” So the disappointment was forgotten in the fun of the chase, and quiet reigned once more in the tank.

But it was a long time before the Maestro could pass that corner of the garden without smiling, and the little idlers on the sunny leaves had peace for quite a long while.

CHAPTER XVII

THE CHURCHES

Below him, through the lovely valley flowed
The river Arno, like a winding road,
And from its banks were lifted high in air
The spires and roofs of Florence called the Fair.

LONGFELLOW.

THE Maestro wanted the children to see Florence before the very hot weather came; for one cannot go from sunny streets into cold buildings without the risk of catching cold.

So they often went down the hill to the town in the Springtime. They would start off together through the garden, giving a cheery call to Carlotta as they passed.

Poor child, she looked wistfully with her big brown eyes at the couple, as they raced down the narrow pathway. They were so strong and active, while she had to sit month after month hoping for the health which was so long in coming.

Alas! Carlotta is only one of many hundreds of little ones who never know the delight of rushing madly through the air. Try to remember sometimes that there are crippled children of your own age who must lie helpless year by year, while you run and play; make their lives happier by your help and sympathy whenever you have the opportunity, just as Yvette and Marietta brought the hope of health and happiness to Carlotta.

But to return to our party. The two girls loved the short cut into Florence. They would dash on ahead to see if they could catch a glimpse of a bright green lizard sunning itself, before it darted in between the big stones.

Halfway down they had a favourite corner with a dear old iron gateway, between two stone seats. Here they would sit until the Maestro caught them up: for he didn't run down the uneven path as they did!

"Where are we going to-day?" asked Marietta.

"I want you to see something of the Churches," said the Maestro, "there are three principal ones. Santa Maria del Fiori, called the Duomo, with the famous Campanile or Bell-tower; that's the biggest, the Cathedral in fact.

Then there is Santa Maria Novella, close to the railway station: we couldn't see it when we arrived because of the early morning mist: and there's another called Santa Croce (pronounced Crowchay) where Giotto's famous frescoes of the life of Saint Francis of Assisi are painted."

"What a beautiful tower!" exclaimed Yvette, as they stood looking up at the Campanile, which stands, slender and graceful as a tall lily, beside the Duomo of Florence.

"One can hardly believe that this was the creation of a simple shepherd lad, who was found drawing pictures of his sheep on flat pieces of stone," said the Maestro. "Giotto was his name, an easy one to remember."

"He did make spindley little pillars in the windows, all twisty," said Marietta, "they don't look as if they'd last any time."

"They look fragile," the Maestro agreed, "but they've lasted about six hundred years already without coming to any harm: which shows that the old stone-masons knew their job."

"Look at all the pigeons," said Yvette, "how bright the colours on their necks are, just like mother-of-pearl."

"They're always like that at this time of year," said Marietta, who knew, because her aunt in Kent kept pigeons.

"'In the Spring a livelier Iris changes on the burnished dove,' " quoted the Maestro, "and I may as well tell you that Iris was goddess of the Rainbow, and, according to some people, the mother of Cupid."



THE CAMPANILE

“ Now I know why Beppo always will stand out in the rain,” said Marietta, “ he hopes he will see his mamma.”

Then they went into the dimness of the great Church: there were no chairs or pews, only a wide marble floor crowded with people, who were listening to a preacher, for it was Lent.

A purple curtain like a huge sail was stretched over the central aisle, over the heads of the listeners, so that the monk's voice could be heard better.

They could see him in the distance as he leant forward from the pulpit, wearing the brown habit of his Order: his face, thin and drawn by long fasting, glowed with a kind of ecstasy as he poured forth his message to the people below.

With such a crowd it was impossible to get close enough to hear his words, so the Maestro and the children walked quietly round the side aisles as far as the great dome, and passed behind the High Altar, where stands Michel-Angelo's last work, the Pietà which was left unfinished at his death.

As they left the building they passed under the portrait of Sir John Hawkwood, the famous Englishman who fought in Italy in the Middle Ages.

“ Who did he fight for?” whispered Marietta.

“ To tell the truth,” replied the Maestro, “ he fought for whichever side gave him the most pay; for he and his men were what are called Mercenaries, who could be hired to fight, just as we hire a chimney-sweep to sweep our chimneys. The Italians couldn't get his name right, so they called him Aguto, as you see under the painting.’ ”

Opposite the Duomo stands a big eight-sided building called the Baptistery. *It is older than the Cathedral, and stands on the ruins of a Roman temple, older still.

Afterwards, whenever they passed it, Yvette and Marietta always peeped in at the side door to see if there were any tiny babies in lace shawls being christened at the big marble Font.

But this time they only looked at the bronze doors facing them.

“How dusty they are!” exclaimed Marietta, “I wish we could come down early some morning and clean all the powdery white stuff off them with a soft brush, they would look ever so much nicer.”

“It would be a very good thing,” agreed the Maestro, “the dust robs them of much of their beauty: I wonder some Florentine society doesn’t take over the charge of the bronze doors and other monuments which want a little loving care.

Lorenzo Ghiberti’s doors are very beautiful, aren’t they?”

And they looked together at the many scenes from Bible history so wonderfully modelled on the bronze panels.

“Now let’s come to Bigazzi, in the Via del Proconsolo,” he said, “and see if we can pick up anything for the Torre. We should always try to leave a place a little better than we found it; that’s what I was told when I was your age.”

So they rummaged among the old chests and china and picture-frames to their heart’s content until it was time for luncheon: and when they left the shop, Bigazzi was to send three majolica jars for flowers, a big piece of crimson Genoa velvet, with faded gold embroidery, and an Italian carved chest, painted with a wedding procession, to the Torre della Pace.

“I feel certain it’s one of the Buondelmonte Weddings,” said the Maestro to excuse himself for having bought it, for he couldn’t really afford it! “and I’m sure it will bring us luck.”

After luncheon they went off to Santa Croce, which stands at the end of a big Square, in the centre of which is a modern statue of Dante Alighieri, whose Arms, as you know, are painted on the ceiling of Titania’s Palace.

The front of the Church has only been finished recently and it looks rather bare inside; but there is a tomb on the left of the aisle as you go up it, which is worth coming all the way to Florence to see.

“It’s by Mino da Fiesole,” explained the Maestro. “He lived up our way, which makes it more interesting; don’t you wish he’d



THE BRONZE DOORS

left some of his work in our little chapel. But, perhaps, it's better here, where everybody can see it.

This Church," he continued, "was the Headquarters of the great Order of Franciscan monks in Florence, and I'm afraid, from what we read, they weren't always very polite to their brothers of the Dominican Order, whose Church was Santa Maria Novella, where we are going now."

They walked back along the embankment of the river Arno, and the two girls flattened their noses against the shop windows. They were full of the most attractive presents. Leather-work and straw-work, picture frames in ebony, inlaid with ivory, and in carved walnut; little statuettes in marble and bronze, mosaic brooches, silver filigree work, corals of all kinds, fans, and tortoise-shell combs.

"Now, children," said the Maestro, as they turned up a narrow street leading to Santa Maria Novella, "you must try to coax me past a shop on the right of the Piazza here, or we shan't get back to dinner."

"I'm sure it's that one with ANTICHITA in big letters over it," cried Yvette. "Come along, Maestro, and look at these two funny kind of monuments in the middle of the Square. They are like square pillars with pointed tops. Do look! they're standing on bronze tortoises! What are they for?"

"They were the winning posts of a racecourse which ended here in olden days, and are called obelisks.

Now we'll just walk through the Church and out at the other door, that will be enough for to-day, but we'll often come back again."

The children liked this Church better than Santa Croce, it looked much more furnished. There were pictures over all the side altars, but many were already covered up in preparation for Holy Week. The walls were decorated with coloured marbles and bright coloured frescoes, which, I should have told you, are wall paintings.

"This is the picture I want you to see," whispered the Maestro, "the famous Madonna by Cimabue (Cheemarbooy, please). It was

thought so beautiful when it was painted six hundred years ago, that the people of Florence carried it in procession to the Chapel where it still hangs. You will like it better when you grow older, and when you know more about the wonderful history of Florentine painting. So be satisfied to include it among the big stones I told you of, on which you may safely build as you grow up.

And now for tea, the tram, and the Torre."

CHAPTER XVIII

MARIETTA'S BIRTHDAY

A day to childhood seems a year,
And years like passing ages.

CAMPBELL.

I KNOW what she'd like best," said Yvette confidently. She and the Maestro were discussing Marietta's coming birthday. "She'd like one of your sketches of Beppo, she simply adores him."

"Of course she shall have one," said the Maestro, "but that's such a little thing to give her." For he naturally didn't set a very high value on his own work. "We must think of something more important for such an occasion."

"I've found out what most of them are going to give her," said Yvette. "Carlo and Carlotta have got her a lovely work-box, so cleverly made out of straw, 'roba di paglia,' it's called. It doesn't sound very exciting," she added, "but it's really wonderful work. It was made by Carlo's cousin, who lives up at Fiesole, which makes it much more interesting."

Then Margherita is giving her a dear little majolica jar, that's been in her family for years and years: blue and white, just the very thing for flowers. It had *ESTR GENTIUM* written round it; she showed it to me yesterday."

"It sounds like a Savona piece," said the Maestro, a little enviously, "the words on it refer to the ointment or medicine it used to contain. Those jars are sometimes called Pharmacy jars, and sometimes Albarelli."

But you ought to know as much about them as I do, for you have

helped Bella dust the ones in the Torre every morning for weeks. They make the best vases for flowers I know. Marietta is lucky!"

"Nurse and I have arranged a splendid present for Maria to give," went on Yvette. "It's a little green china frog we found in her mother's shop: such a funny little fellow, just like the ones in the tank here: I know she'll like it."

But we are a bit puzzled about Beppo's; you see, his mamma only sells fruit and vegetables and things."

"How would it do to let Beppo give her the little pencil sketch of Cupid, in a nice frame," suggested the Maestro, "we can easily get one in time."

"That's a splendid idea!" cried Yvette joyfully; "then she'll have something from both of them."

But what will you give her yourself?"

"I wonder if she'd like a chain to go round her neck with a pendent made like the Lily of Florence in red enamel. Then she'd think of the old Torre whenever she wears it, and the most beautiful city in the world, except Venice, but that's different."

"I know she'd like that more than anything," said Yvette, "let's go and look at the shops this afternoon; I'll find out which kind she likes best without letting her guess it's for her."

"You haven't told me yet what your own present is going to be," said the Maestro.

"I'm keeping that a most particular secret, please," said Yvette.

As the Birthday drew near, there was an air of suppressed excitement noticeable among the inhabitants of the Torre della Pace. Even Beppo became less boisterous when he thought of the wonderful frame, containing his picture, which he had been allowed to see and handle, and which reposed in his own little drawer, safely wrapped in tissue paper. Maria's hot hand often clasped the cherished green frog.

"I don't believe they'll either of them part with their presents when the time comes," said the Maestro, laughing.

There was a great tea-party to celebrate the event. Carlotta and



Alla mia amata Padroncina per
il suo giorno di nascita dal suo
devoto e vecchio servitore

Carlo

Alla Padroncina con affettuosi
auguri della sua piccolina
figliola

Carletta

CHE DIO BENEDICA LA NOSTRA
SIGNORINA E BENEDETTO IL
ANNIVERSARIO DEL GIORNO
CHE IL CIELO LE LA MANDA
PER ALTARCI NELLA NOSTRA
FAMIGLIA

Maria

La mia amata Signorina
per il suo giorno
di nascita

Marietta

MARIETTA'S PRESENTS

TABLE

the four other children were to have their feast in the Children's Room, while Margherita entertained " Signora " Maria and " Signora " Beppo with old Carlo in the Kitchen. Giovanni Battista was to come too if his work at the railway station was over in time.

Then there was such a picking and arranging of flowers: such a decorating of the tea-table with baskets of sweets and baskets of fruit, one for each of the guests.

Marietta behaved nobly: one would think she didn't know when her birthday was, and she always looked the other way when Beppo and Maria examined their treasures.

I wish you could have been there to see the party. First there was breakfast, where the grand ceremony of presentation took place. Beppo and Maria had been instructed for days by Yvette, and both of them managed to say:

" Mannie 'appee rit-tuns obi-da-ee "

with such a quaint Italian accent. And they, somewhat reluctantly, parted with the cherished frog and frame.

Then you should have seen the little one's faces when they saw the table at tea-time, blazing with its twelve lighted candles, and groaning under its load of cakes and fruit and sweets.

The Maestro was afraid something would happen to Cupid's eyes, so huge did they become.

But you'll all be wanting to know what Yvette's present to Marietta was.

She had bought her the most perfect little model, in the proper colours, of their favourite Della Robbia baby in front of the Innocenti. It was made of majolica, and could be hung up on the wall.

" We're both sure that it was this one which helped us find Maria," Yvette explained.

CHAPTER XIX

THE LETTER

If your love do not persuade you to come,
Let not my letter.

The Merchant of Venice.

MARIETTA and Yvette had not been settled in the Torre very long, before they selected a hiding-place in the "Podere."

No self-respecting garden, however tiny, is complete without some corner where one can get snugly away from all grown-up disturbers of the peace.

Just a few steps beyond the famous tank a footpath led up the hill, and if you followed this. . . .

"Please don't tell them exactly where it is," says an appealing voice at my elbow, "just say what it was like; I'm sure they won't mind."

"Very well, then." It was just a sort of hollow in the hill-side, with a big tuft of Oleanders masking the entrance, and a thicket of roses pouring down from above. The children called it "The Bower."

There was a little mossy seat. . . .

"How did you find all this out?" demands the voice. "We thought it was such a secret, and you know you never came in when we were there."

"My dear," I replied, "one of the strange things about a story book is that the writer is able to pry into the most secret places. Why! he even knows what people are thinking."

"Yes, I suppose that's true," says the voice thoughtfully: "how awfully careful we must be what we think about, while we are in the book."

But to come back to the hiding-place.

The two girls used often to disappear into it after tea, on the long Summer evenings, when the Maestro was busy in the Printing Room, and Maria and Beppo safely in bed.

They would take an orange or two for refreshment, and plan all sorts of schemes, snugly curled up on the crisp dry moss.

"I've thought of a splendid idea," said Yvette one evening, when they had made themselves comfortable: "you remember that big man the Maestro pointed out to us in the Picture Gallery with the fizzy sounding name, don't you?" (Oh fie, Yvette! after all the trouble the Maestro took to teach you how to pronounce Uffizi!)

Marietta nodded, "I remember him, he wore a white waistcoat: the man he said was an American, and very, very rich."

"That's the one. Now my idea is that we two, all by ourselves, should make him buy the Picture! Isn't that splendid?" and she clasped her hands round her knees and rocked herself to and fro.

"But supposing he won't buy it," objected her more cautious companion. "And anyhow, how are we to tell him to? We don't even know him to speak to."

"Yes, that's my difficulty," admitted Yvette: "that's why I want to think it out with you. I've been turning it all over in my mind, and I can't quite think of a plan. There *must* be some way, I'm sure; people in books are always doing things like that. We've got to think hard, Marietta, it's the only way."

Two little foreheads, usually smooth, were puckered up into unwonted wrinkles, and the flowers could almost hear the children thinking.

"I've thought of picking up his purse when he drops it," said Yvette, "or of getting faint just when his motor car stops, so that he picks me up and takes me to the doctor: or finding his much-loved dog when he loses it. But, perhaps, he hasn't got one," she added, ruefully.

"I've thought of asking him the way to Cupid's Court, and then

telling him it's not a place but a picture he really must buy," said Marietta.

"That's quite a good idea," Yvette agreed, "only he might be angry and tell you to run away; which would spoil it all. We must think of something that's absolutely certain sure to work. How would it do to get close to him when it's raining, so he could offer to shelter us under his umbrella?"

Marietta looked up doubtfully at a perfectly cloudless evening sky. "We might have to wait a long time," she sighed.

"We'll manage somehow," said Yvette, with decision; "because I have quite made up my mind that you and I and the Maestro must go for another trip together somewhere else."

"Perhaps it would help if we found out his name first, and where he lives," suggested Marietta; "I'm sure the Maestro will tell us."

"Yes, that's another good idea," said her companion, nodding. So the two conspirators, putting on their most innocent air, asked the Maestro at dinner that night who the big man was they saw at the Gallery.

"Oh, you mean Hoffmann of New York, the millionaire," he said. "He has taken the big villa you can see on the hill above us; it used to belong to the Salviati family, the Palazzo Superba I think it's called. I've done a number of sketches of it at various times.

He is a widower with two girls, one grown up and the other a little older than Marietta: at least that is what Mrs. Andrews told me at her last tea-party.

Bigazzi the dealer tells me Hoffmann buys quite a lot of good stuff for the villa. I wish I could get him here, he might give me a commission."

"There!" said Yvette triumphantly, as she took off her stockings preparatory to getting into bed. "Now we know all about Mr. Hoffmann; so all we've got to do is to make him buy the Picture!"

"I'm glad he told us about the daughter," said Marietta, "because

it has given me an idea. How would it be to suggest to him to buy the picture for her birthday?"

"That's very clever of you," said Yvette approvingly, "but it might seem a little sudden for total strangers to ask him like that. I know! This is what we'll do: we'll write a letter together saying we are sure he will soon be wanting a birthday present for his daughter, and the Maestro paints such lovely portraits of children he ought to have her painted by him."

"But that won't sell Cupid's Court," objected her companion.

"Wait a minute: we'll say that perhaps it wouldn't be a very good Birthday Present for her, so he might buy her a picture instead, and we know of a lovely one! Let's think it out and make up a letter in the Bower to-morrow."

So two little brains were cudgelled and this was the result:

TORRE DELLA PACE,
SAN DOMENICO,
FLORENCE,
ITALY.

MY DEAR MR. HOFFMAN,

We have heard that you have a little daughter a little older than Marietta, so you will want a Birthday Present very soon because time goes so quickly. We know a man who paints lovely portraits. mine was exactly like. I'm Yvette, so she could be done by him and it would be a nice present, but perhaps she doesn't like a picture of herself it would do for you and she could have a picture instead. we know a lovely one, with Beppo and Maria and Marietta in it and me.

From your loving and respectfully
YVETTE AND MARIETTA.

"I don't see how he can help buying it now," said Yvette, gazing proudly at their united handiwork.



TORRE DELLA PACE,
SAN DOMENICO,
FLORENCE,
ITALY.

My dear Mr. Hoffman,

We have heard that you

have a little daughter a little older than Marietta, so you will want a Birthday present very soon because time goes so quickly. We know a man who paints lovely portraits. Mine was exactly like I'm Yvette, so she could be done by him and it would be a nice present, but perhaps she does'n't like a picture of herself it would do for you and she could have a picture instead. We know a lovely one, with Beppo and Maria and Marietta it and me. From your loving and respectfully
Yvette and Marietta

CHAPTER XX

THE ANSWER

A FEW days later the Maestro was idly sorting the letters at breakfast when his glance fell on one addressed:

THE MISSES YVETTE AND MARIETTA,
TORRE DELLA PACE,
SAN DOMENICO.

“You’ll have to fight for this one,” he cried gaily, as he threw it across to them: “perhaps you had better toss up who opens it.”

“Oh, it’s all right,” said the children hastily; “we know all about it, it’s both of ours!”

Luckily the Maestro was busy with an etching that morning, so the two sped away to their hiding-place, leaving Maria and Beppo in charge of Bella.

With trembling fingers Yvette tore open the envelope, and this is what she read:

PALAZZO SUPERBA,
FIESOLE.

LADIES,

I have handed your communication to my daughter, Miss Inez Hoffmann, and she has commissioned me to say that she appreciates your kind thought.

(“Oh dear,” interrupted Marietta, “she must be quite grown up to say things like that, much older than me. But go on, please!”)

Her birthday will not be until February.

(“What a pity,” cry both voices at once).

So she is afraid that a present would be a little premature. But

perhaps you would allow us to look at the picture you mention with so much enthusiasm.

It may interest you to hear that I have seen some of the work of the gentleman you mention, and think it good: so unless you phone me to the contrary, we shall be with you at a quarter of four to-morrow, Thursday.

Yours faithfully,

LEONIDAS K. HOFFMANN.

“Why, that’s to-day! they’ll be here at a quarter of four; I wonder what ‘of’ means, a quarter *to* or a quarter *past*. Anyhow we shall wait in until they come, whichever it is.” And Yvette careered round the Bower waving the letter in triumph.

“We must tell the Maestro, I suppose,” said Marietta.

“Oh, we can just say that two friends of ours are coming: they are friends now they’re coming, you know: I simply love them both!”

So the Maestro, who was wrapped up in his etching, and rather grudged the time wasted at luncheon, didn’t pay much attention when they broke the news to him, but simply said. “Give them a good tea.”

The indignant honking of a motor, as it struggled into the vial, brought the children racing to the iron gate. They were dressed in their very best Sunday frocks, silk stockings, and their bright faces shone with soap and excitement.

“That’s Marietta,” said Yvette timidly, pointing to her companion, who held open the other half of the gate.

“Glad to meet you,” said the big man, who had just helped a rather haughty-looking damsel of about thirteen out of the motor; and he gave Marietta’s hand a hearty shake. “And you’re Yvette, I guess: this is my daughter Inez.”

The children shook hands, and then there was one of those awkwardly shy pauses which are so hard to break, until, in desperation, Yvette blurted out; “Do you like guinea-pigs?” to which question Inez replied, with a touch of hauteur: “No, but my Pekinese

is called Ching," and the party relapsed into silence until they reached the Drawing-room.

Then Mr. Hoffmann, feeling that it was up to him to dispel the frost, said genially: "You seem vurry comfortable here, I guess your friend has a studio."

"Oh yes he has, a lovely one," cried Yvette, and, the tension relaxed, she rattled on until all traces of shyness had disappeared: "that's where the Picture is; it's of Beppo and me and Marietta and Maria, and lots of roses and an orange tree: and Beppo has nothing on, that is he has only a quiver, and we couldn't get him to stand still for a moment: there are real arrows in it: shall we go and see it? I'll run and see if the Maestro is busy." And she was off like a flash!

Mr. Hoffmann turned to Marietta. "So it appears that the gentleman your young friend calls Maystro doesn't expect us."

"It's like this: he doesn't know it's *you*," she explained, "we told him we had two friends coming. You don't mind being called friends, do you? Yvette said you must be if you were coming to see our Picture."

"Why, we sure are!" said the American, smiling.

Yvette returned breathless. "There's nobody in the Studio!" she whispered: "I think the Maestro must be in the Printing Room, but the door is shut."

"Let's come along right away," said the big man, entering into the spirit of the adventure: "don't say a thing!" And he crept on tiptoe after Yvette across the passage, followed by the older two. There on an easel stood the result of many months of patient work. The big Picture seemed to light up the gray walls and carry a cheery message to all who saw it, which said:

"God's in his heaven, all's right with the world!"

There in the centre stood Cupid, the very embodiment of all that the poets have sung about Love.

His halo of golden curls shone in the sunlight.

One could almost hear the rippling laughter of the children grouped round him :

Sunglow flushed their comely cheeks,
Windplay tossed their hair.

“ That’s great,” was Mr. Hoffmann’s quiet comment.

He felt a warm little hand steal into his, and a timid voice at his side asked : “ Aren’t you glad you came ? ”

“ That’s so ! ” he said, looking down at Yvette ; “ and me and Inez thank you for the invitation. Where did he paint it ? ”

“ Come along and I’ll show you ; it was out in the Courtyard. ”

So they all went out into the Fountain Court, and the two girls showed their visitors how Cupid’s Court was staged.

The Maestro, at work in the Printing Room, looked up from a proof he had just passed through the Press, and to his astonishment saw strangers grouped round the fountain.

“ Great Scott,” he ejaculated : “ It’s Hoffmann ! Now what in the name of Fortune brought *him* here ? He seems pretty much at home anyhow ! That must be his younger daughter. Yvette and Marietta don’t seem a bit afraid of him. ”

Then a sudden thought struck him.

“ So these are the two friends coming to tea they spoke about at luncheon. It’s not far off five o’clock now and I’m up to my eyes in printer’s ink ! Well, there’s no help for it,” and he crossed over to the window and leant out.

A cry of joy greeted his appearance. “ There’s the Maestro,” shouted Yvette, “ doesn’t he look lovely in his blue smock ? ”

Mr. Hoffmann walked across the marble pavement.

“ Glad to meet you,” he said, holding out his hand.

“ I’m afraid I’m hardly in a fit state for the conventional form of greeting,” apologized the Maestro, showing his palm covered with ink. “ But if you will accept my wrist : after all it was the Roman method of hand-shake, wasn’t it ? ”

"I'm told that is so," said the genial American, grasping him heartily by the wrist. "This is my daughter Inez. We've just been admiring your big picture, and she's just dying to see that cunning little Cupid in the flesh. Is he around?"

Marietta dashed off and returned in a couple of minutes with Beppo and Maria.

The two little models were duly admired.

"Now, Inez," said her father, "you and your friends can take young Cupid for a walk. I'll have a chat with Mr. Maestro."

So the little party went off in high spirits. Inez was shown the frog's tank; the little streamlet; Carlo's dog; Carlotta, and all the other joys of the Podere.

"I've been wanting an opportunity for a talk with you for a long time," said Mr. Hoffmann: "the fact is, Inez hasn't anyone to help her along, now my other daughter is married. When her dear mother was alive it was all right.

You can understand, can't you?"

You see we're rich, and Inez can't help but know it. She's a good girl and a clever girl, but she's getting spoilt, that's all: she thinks life is all Opera and Automobile.

Miss Fermi comes to give her lessons now, and she told me about your girls; she put it into my head that my daughter wants young companions.

I believe in putting things plain. We're neighbours: will you let your girls and my girl Inez play around together?"

"I'm afraid we shan't be here much longer," said the Painter, "the picture is nearly finished, and I must be back by the end of September." I'm sorry the children didn't meet before. However, there's still a fortnight left, and if my two agree, for I must leave the decision to them, the whole party can have a little fun together."

"Now that's real kind of you," said Mr. Hoffmann, "you'll let me know whether they'll come."

As soon as the owner of the Palazzo Superba and his daughter had gone the two children rushed at the Maestro.

“ Did he buy the picture!” they asked, eagerly.

“ No, he didn’t, I don’t think he even mentioned it,” he said, rather puzzled at their excitement. “ Now I come to think of it, how did you make his acquaintance?”

The little faces fell. “ What a shame! we did think he was going to buy it,” they said mournfully.

“ Let’s hear how you met the gentleman,” persisted the Maestro.

“ Please may we keep that a secret for a little while,” pleaded Yvette.

“ If you like, my dears; but tell me, did you get on all right with Inez?”

“ Oh, she’s not a bad sort: you see her sister’s married, and she hasn’t a mother, so she would be a little different, wouldn’t she?” said Yvette.

“ She didn’t mind dirtying her frock a bit when we had frog races in the tank, and it was a lovely one, all lacey!”

“ Then you think you would like her to come again?”

“ Yes, rather, she’s quite decent really,” agreed the children. “ And I do so want to see her Pekinese,” added Marietta.

“ Mr. Hoffmann wants you to play with her as often as you can,” said the Maestro. “ We have still a fortnight more; but I don’t want to spoil the end of your visit. Think it over and let me know if it is to be Inez and the Palazzo Superba or not.”

“ Isn’t it a shame his not buying Cupid’s Court?” said Marietta, up in their bedroom that night, “ I made sure he was going to.”

“ I’m not going to give up!” said Yvette, stoutly: “ we’ll make him somehow. Anyhow, we may as well go and see the Pekinese: Inez isn’t a bad sort: did you see that little duck of a watch she has with diamonds all round it? They must be awfully rich.”

“ Yes, let’s go,” said Marietta sleepily.



V. de S. Maria Firenze
1893.

THE PALAZZO SUPERBA

CHAPTER XXI

THE PALAZZO SUPERBA

In her grand Villa, halfway up the hill,
O'er looking Florence, but retired and still ;
With terraced gardens, and broad steps of stone
And sylvan deities, with moss o'ergrown,
And fountains palpitating in the heat,
And all Val d'Arno stretched beneath its feet.

LONGFELLOW.

NEXT day two messengers passed each other on the road between the Torre and the Palazzo.

One carried a message from the Maestro saying that, unless Mr. Hoffmann telephoned to the contrary, Marietta and Yvette would come up that evening to have tea with Inez.

A smart footman from the Palazzo left a note for the Maestro.

The latter was busy in the Printing Room when Bella brought it, and as his hands were all inky he only asked if anyone was waiting for an answer.

“ No, Signore,” she said. So he told her to leave it on the table.

The two children's bright faces peeped in at him from the Fountain Court before they set out for the Palazzo.

They found Inez and her beloved Pekinese waiting for them; and Ching, suspicious at first, gradually unbent, and with the lofty condescension peculiar to his race, accepted their homage.

“ Well, children, how did you get on ?” said the Maestro cheerily, as the party assembled in the dining-room that night.

“ We like Inez, and oh! you should see their Drawing-rooms, three of them, just like that room at the Louvre, only not so big, of

course. Full of things like you see upstairs in the Bargello. You simply must come and see them.

And we're all to go to Siena in the Rolls Royce, and take our luncheon, and you're to come too: you will, won't you?" and the little tongues babbled on, telling of all the wonders of the Palazzo and the plans they had made with their new friends.

"What were you printing to-day?" they asked him.

"I pulled a few more proofs of the etching I did of Beppo," he said, "we'll have a look at them after dinner; which reminds me. I don't believe I opened that note Bella brought me. Run and fetch it, Yvette, there's a dear; it's on the little table by the door."

"I say, children!" he cried joyfully, as he read it, "here's a bit of luck! your friend Hoffmann wants to buy Cupid's Court!"

"Hurrah! We've done it!" cried both children together, "please read what he says," and they both hung over his shoulder.

The Maestro looked at the eager little faces, and a sudden thought struck him.

"You didn't by any chance catch Hoffmann and Inez in a net on the hillside, and put them in the Studio to buy the picture!" he exclaimed.

"Not exactly," said Yvette. "Shall we tell him our secret, Marietta?"

So the story of the letter was told, a little nervously at first, but they saw a smile broaden on the Maestro's face as the humour of the situation dawned upon him.

"I'd give anything to see that letter, and Hoffmann's face when he read it," he exclaimed at last. "You artful little monkeys! You had no business to do anything of the sort, of course, and I ought to be very cross. Oh dear! Oh dear! and you signed it 'your loving and respectfully,' delightful!"

"There!" said Yvette to Marietta, as they got into bed; "that's made up for the frogs, anyhow."

CHAPTER XXII

A RIVEDERCI!

Be useful where thou livest, that they may
Both want and wish thy pleasing presence still.

GEORGE HERBERT.

THE children were so happy playing with Inez, Maria, and little Beppo (oh dear, I'm forgetting His Highness Prince Ching! He really should have come first!) that the last weeks seemed to fly.

Carlotta, thanks to their care, was getting stronger every day, and could sometimes take Moschino for little walks round the Podere. You can imagine how old Carlo beamed on them, and chanted the Garibaldi Hymn with renewed vigour.

"Oh dear! must we be going back so soon?" sighed Marietta, as they walked up to the Palazzo with the Maestro.

"I guess so, as Hoffmann would say," said the Maestro; "the picture is not only finished but sold, thanks to two little schemers!

I can assure you I don't want to go back any more than you do: but, as I told you before, life isn't all holidays and sunshine, any more than it's all Opera and Automobile.

Don't forget what dear old George Herbert says:

God gave thy soul brave wings, put not those feathers
Into a bed, to sleep out all ill weathers.

We shall all remember the Torre, I know; and let's hope that some of the things we've seen together; marble statues, eh Marietta! will be firm foundation stones for you to build upon."

Mr. Hoffmann and the Maestro sat on the broad terrace of the

Palazzo watching the children as they played among the trees and fountains below, their happy voices mingling with Ching's shrill bark.

"Have you got to leave Florence?" asked the American. "Your kids have done Inez a world of good, and we'll miss you."

"It's very hard to tear my two away, I can assure you," said the Maestro, "but I'm afraid I must."

"Say! I've an idea," said his companion, after a pause. "We're going along to the Riviera as soon as it gets cold here: to a little place I've taken near Rapallo; did you ever go there?"

"I know all the coast from Genoa to Savona pretty well, and I've stayed at Rapallo, so I've been to Santa Margarita and Porto Fino. What lovely places they are!"

"Porto Fino, that's the place; now my idea is this. Come and join us with your girls as soon after Christmas as you can get away. Just send me a line to say when you are coming; you know we'll be glad to see you. Here's the address." And he handed the Maestro a card.

"It's very good of you, and if I can possibly manage it I'll bring them. Perhaps it would be best not to say anything about it to the children, in case anything happens to prevent their coming."

* * * * *

I'm not going to linger over the—

"Wild regret of the last goodbye."

The two children were as brave as they could be; but when Yvette stood up in the carriage, as they left the iron gates and the little group of friends clustered round them, and said "Goodbye, dear Torre!" the Maestro saw two tiny drops which "quickly rolled themselves to pearls and fell."

A RIVEDERCI.

AFTERTHOUGHT

“NOW, my dear Yvette,” said the Author, “we come to the hardest part of all, the Preface; you must help me write it.”

“What does Preface actually mean?” asked Yvette.

“I believe it’s properly described as ‘the introduction to a literary work!’ But that isn’t what it usually is: and in any case a Preface of that kind wouldn’t be any use to this book,” said the Author.

“I don’t see how we’re going to help you write it if you don’t give us a better explanation than that,” grumbled Yvette.

“Well, the sort of Preface we want for the beginning of the book is one just thanking people who have helped us, and making excuses for leaving things out that ought to be in, and leaving things in that ought to be out, and all that kind of thing,” said the Author.

“But however can they tell what’s in or out until they’ve read it?” asked Yvette.

“It’s quite clear,” chimed in Marietta, who was listening, “that the Preface ought to be at the end of the book.”

“I’ll put it anywhere you like,” said the Author, “if you’ll write it for me.”

“I think,” said Marietta, “we’d better just say—we are very thankful for people’s help who have helped, and hope they will accept this, the only intimation:—I’m certain I’ve read that somewhere.”

“It sounds awfully well,” said Yvette, “and put this down too, please: if you’ve enjoyed reading about the Torre and Beppo and me and Marietta and the other things, we hope you’ll read about when we go away somewhere else with the Painter again.—

We are going, aren’t we?” she added, anxiously.

“I hope so,” said the Author, “but I’m not sure we ought to call it a Preface if it’s at the end.”

“Call it Afterthought, then,” said Marietta.



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